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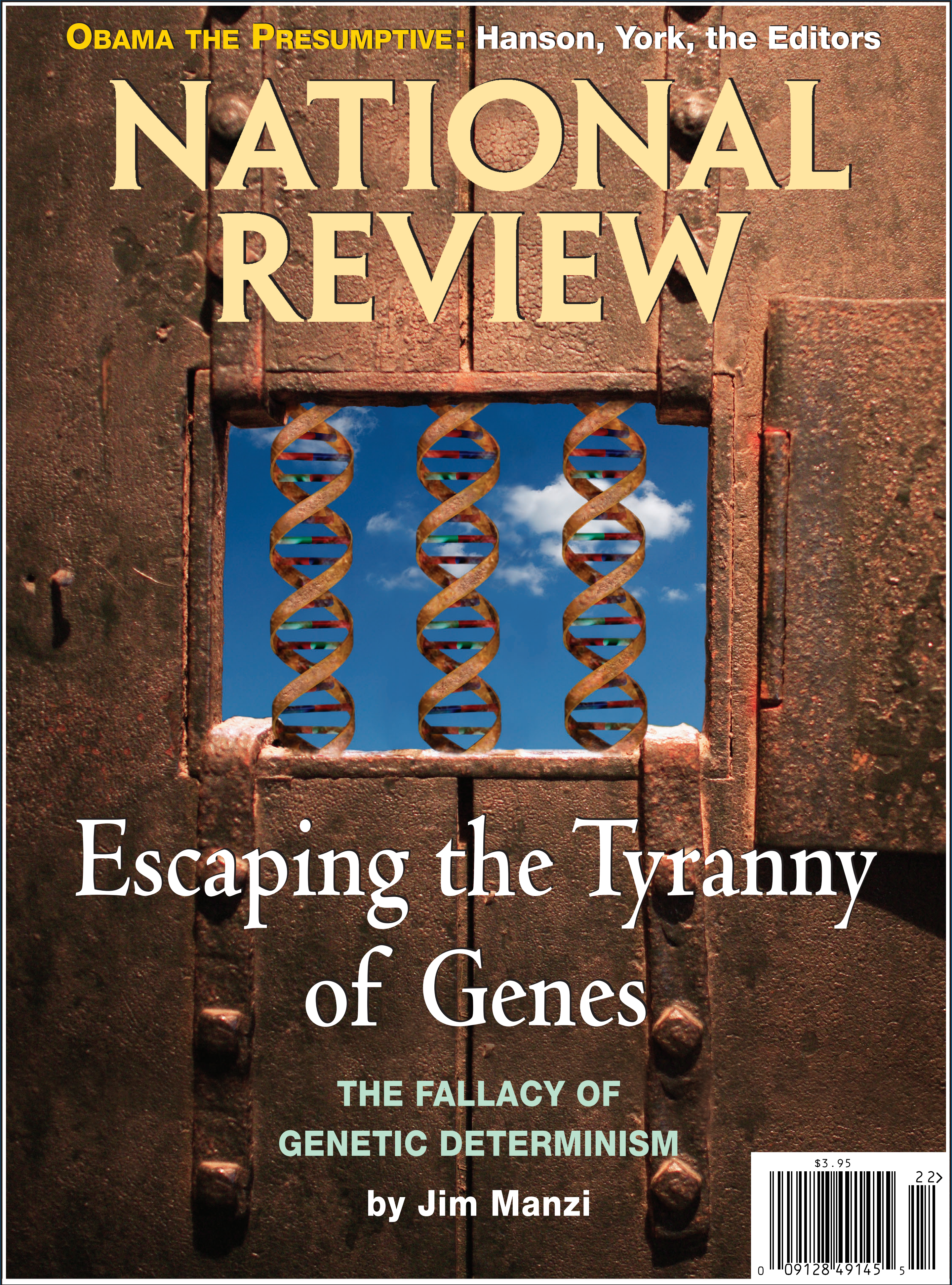

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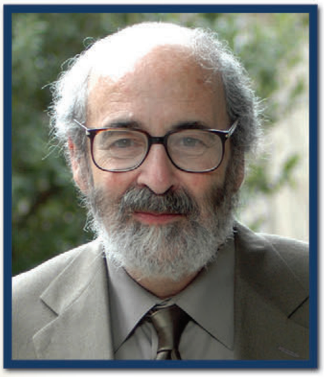

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JUNE 2, 2008 VOL. LX, NO. 10

NATIONAL REVIEW

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■ COVER STORY

Undetermined

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The delineation of the double-helix structure of DNA in 1953 enabled a research program that now seeks to explain a vast array of physical phenomena, from the functioning of individual organisms to the development of species over geological time. This success has led some science popularizers to believe that we have found a new Rosetta Stone enabling us to understand many of the mysteries of human existence. Conservatives should resist such hubris, while at the same time being careful not to deny valid biological science. *By Jim Manzi*

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letters to the editor

O, I WISH I WAS IN THE LAND OF KAROM!

In May 5's "Week," you address Muslim pubs in Great Britain. In listing the entertainment available, you mention karom boards, and offer the aside: "We don't know either."

I grew up in South Georgia playing that game. It is played on a rigid, horizontal board, about three feet square, with pockets at each corner. A karom is a round, wooden circle about one and a half inches in diameter and about half an inch thick. Each of the two players has a different color of karoms.

There are also "shooter" karoms, of yet another color. Each player shoots by thumping his shooter with his index finger. You can shoot repeatedly as long as you sink an opposing karom with each shot. The winner is the player who sinks his opponent's karoms first.

R. Graham Daniell
Metter, Georgia

BE NOT AFRAID

In "Inside Story" (May 19), John Derbyshire asks whether the science of consciousness could undermine the notion of free will. *Scientifically* speaking, perhaps it could. But suppose science did prove that our every choice is the product of causally determined electro-chemical signals in our brains. It would not follow that we would cease to feel free. Nor could we stop acting and choosing (or, if you wish, "acting" and "choosing") and simply wait to see what our next determined step would be. Nor could we toss out the language of freedom—of choices, of right and wrong, of accountability and consequences, of desire and regret, etc.—in favor of mechanistic descriptions. (WIFE: What would you like for dinner tonight, honey? [*HUSBAND grabs marker and scrawls long chain of chemical reactions on the tablecloth.*] WIFE: Beef Wellington *again?!*)

Above all, it would not follow that science had told us *anything* about why the starting conditions of the universe were such that we came to be determined in precisely the way we are—or why there is a universe for us to be determined in.

In other words, a determinist account would neither change the nature of our experience nor put to rest the ultimate questions.

Lester Joe Santos
Wahweap, Ariz.

YOU READ US RIGHT

I had to do a double take, and pinch myself, when I read the words "his deadbeat Kenyan father and his hippie-screwball white mother" ("The Hopeless Pastor," May 19). I found it hard to believe you would characterize Barack Obama's parents that way.

We need to conduct public discussions during this election season with composure, and with respect for our opponents. We should not stir up passions or foment irrationality.

Clinton Braganza
Via e-mail

THE EDITORS RESPOND: Well, we might have explained that Obama's mother has been described by friends as a "fellow traveler" and "the original feminist," and by Obama as "a lonely witness for secular humanism, a soldier for New Deal, Peace Corps, position-paper liberalism." We might have mentioned her penchant for Indonesian handicrafts or her Ph.D. in anthropology. And we might have explained that Obama's father ran off when the audacious, hopeful little tyke was two. But would that have been half as fun?

NATIONAL REVIEW encourages letters to the editor. Letters can be submitted by e-mail to letters@nationalreview.com. Please include your full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters will be edited for space and clarity.

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THE WEEK

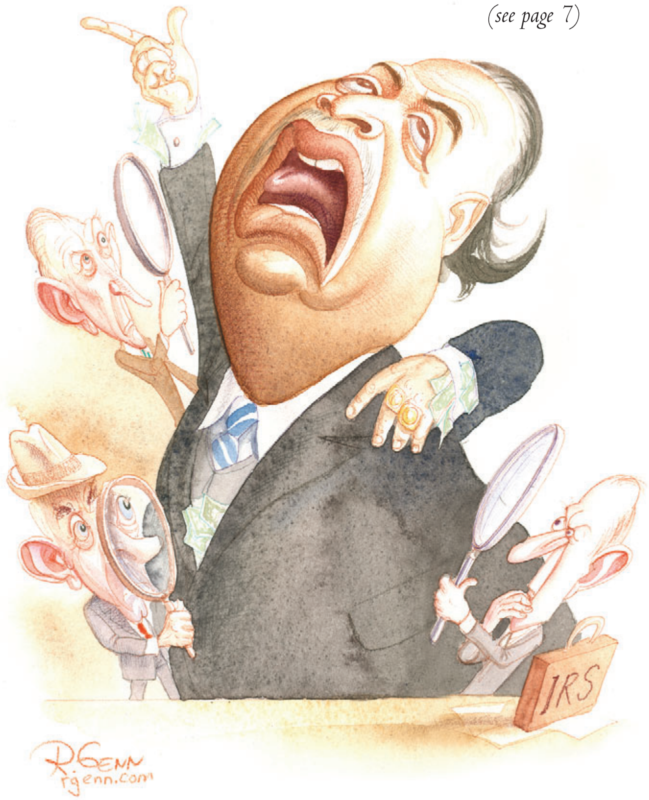
■ Hillary Clinton says she is winning the votes of "hardworking Americans." Maybe so, but she needs a majority of Democrats.

■ You would think, from the cartoons and the commentary, that Clinton had revived the politics of the young Robert Byrd. Give her, and us, a break. What she said, trying to put the best face on her disappointing showing in North Carolina and Indiana, was this: "Senator Obama's support among . . . hardworking Americans, white Americans, is weakening again. . . . Whites in both states who had not completed college were supporting me." Maybe those voters will stay home on Election Day, or vote for John McCain, if Barack Obama is the Democratic nominee. And maybe not. But this is the kind of speculation that pundits and political demographers indulge in routinely. It shows an obsession with racial etiquette to hammer Hillary Clinton for speaking the same way. Could it happen to a better person than the wife of the man who played racial-etiquette games so adroitly all the years of his presidency? No; but that still doesn't make it legit.

■ McCain assailed activist judges, saying that his judicial appointees would interpret the law rather than make it. McCain said he would be looking for nominees with a record of restraint; he would not just trust his instincts about them. In other words: no more Souters; no more Mierses. Liberals said that McCain was battling strawmen, since judicial activism is a myth. Have they met Barack Obama? His announced criteria for judges are rather different from McCain's. "We need somebody who's got the heart, the empathy, to recognize what it's like to be a young teenage mom, the empathy to understand what it's like to be poor or African-American or gay or disabled or old." Empathy for gun owners, or property holders, or corporations, or the unborn does not appear to be something Obama is looking for. If you want judges whose sympathies are with those who have the law on their side, McCain's the better bet.

■ McCain reiterated his support for a "cap and trade" approach to global warming. The government would require reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions but allow companies to trade emissions permits, in order to bring about the reductions as efficiently as possible. It is the biggest mistake his campaign has made so far. We do not fault him for thinking that government should guard against the risk of global warming. But the cost of mandatory emissions reductions—expensive energy, lost wealth and freedom—is not worth the slight reduction in risk they would secure. By taking this position, McCain is missing the opportunity to be the cheap-energy candidate. Conservatives who support McCain should also work to elect senators who will stop his most foolish schemes.

Taxing times for Al
(see page 7)



ROMAN GENN

■ Environmentalists have sued to get the Interior Department to list the polar bear as an endangered species. In the past, listing species as endangered has led to restrictions on development in their habitat. This time, the consequences would be bigger. Polar bears are supposedly endangered because global warming might melt the icecaps where they live. So the federal government might be obliged to stop a power plant from opening in Kentucky in order to protect it. The good news is that the polar-bear population has actually been increasing, and the scenarios in which they would be threatened are speculative. Upending the economy to fight global warming is a bad idea, but doing it without a vote, in response to a lawsuit, is a worse one.

■ McCain's health-care plan would make health insurance affordable for the first time for millions of Americans, by eliminating tax penalties on and regulatory obstacles to the purchase of insurance by individuals. Elizabeth Edwards, the wife of John, is leading a chorus of liberal critics. They say that insurers will not offer affordable policies to people with preexisting conditions, such as cancer patients. They have the story backward. McCain's plan would in the long run be helpful for these people. Current tax and regulatory policies make

UNLESS YOU'RE READING THIS ON YOUR YACHT, YOU SHOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR LONG-TERM FINANCIAL SECURITY.

The health care and financial security crises facing this country affect all of us. And during this election year, we're hearing a lot about "working together" and the need for "change" to fix the situation.

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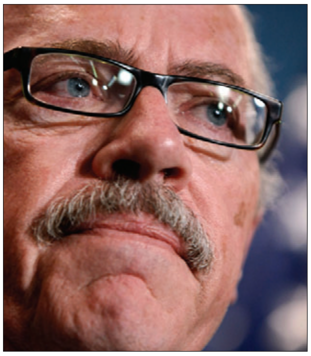
THE WEEK...

people dependent on their employers for coverage. If they have a severe illness, they run into trouble when they switch or lose their jobs, or their employer changes their coverage. In a free insurance market, people would be able to buy cheap, renewable policies before they got sick—insuring, before the fact, against the risk that they will get sick, rather than trying to persuade a company to take on their high costs after the fact. Mrs. Edwards is mistaking a solution for a problem.

■ Cindy McCain refuses to release her tax returns. “This is a privacy issue. My husband is the candidate,” she said on the *Today* show. The McCains have filed separate tax returns for 28 years. Mrs. McCain, who inherited one of the nation’s largest Anheuser-Busch distributorships from her father, may be worth as much as $100 million. “What is John McCain trying to hide?” asked Howard Dean. We assume nothing. But the age of financial discretion is long gone. Our candidates live in fishbowls. So do their families, and this applies to the resources of wives and husbands. Cindy McCain is within the law to keep her business to herself, but she is not within the mores of contemporary politics.



WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY

■ There are those candidates who make themselves ridiculous by repeatedly running for president: Stassen, Keyes, Buchanan, Nader. Then there are those candidates who make themselves ridiculous by running for president at all. Former Republican congressman Bob Barr, who has just announced a run as the Libertarian-party nominee, falls in that category. An undistinguished backbencher, he lost the GOP primary for his House seat in 2002. (His cause wasn’t helped when he accidentally discharged a .38-caliber pistol while at a fundraiser.) The ACLU subsequently employed him as an agitator against the Bush administration’s legal tactics in the War on Terror. Conservatives could take comfort in this, since he was finally discrediting a cause other than their own. He might filch some votes from John McCain, who can’t afford to lose any, but only among conservatives so disaffected that they are willing to endorse Barr’s buffoonery.

■ The news keeps getting worse for House Republicans. They lost a special election in a Louisiana district they had owned for three decades. The Republicans tried to tie the pro-life, pro-gun Democratic candidate to Barack Obama’s liberalism, and predictably failed. The story repeated itself in a special election in Mississippi, in a district Bush had won with 62 percent of the vote in 2004. In New York, meanwhile, Rep. Vito Fossella was pulled over for driving drunk—and it emerged that he was going to visit his mistress and their daughter. Perhaps the House Republicans can get themselves protected as an endangered species?

■ Congress is debating a $178 billion supplemental-spending bill to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill is long overdue, and President Bush has warned that unless Congress acts in a timely fashion, it will mean furloughs for as many as 200,000 civilian defense workers. Congressional Democrats are trying to hijack the bill. Sen. Jim Webb proposes to expand education benefits to veterans, which is a fine idea, except that Webb wants to provide the full range of benefits after only three years, thus eliminating a valuable incentive from the effort to retain troops. Conservative lawmakers should also block attempts by Democrats (and some Republicans) to attach unrelated domestic spending to a bill intended to fund military operations overseas. As long as our troops are in harm’s way, the focus should stay on making sure our military commanders have everything they need to prosecute the war successfully.

■ Ward Connerly once envisioned sponsoring ballot referenda to end racial preferences in five states this November, just as he has done previously in California, Michigan, and Washington. Then he bumped into Oklahoma’s tough qualifying laws and his goal dropped to four. In early May, it shrank to three when Missourians failed to collect enough signatures. They were hobbled by Robin Carnahan, the Democratic secretary of state, who tried to rewrite the ballot language in ways hostile to supporters. A judge eventually ruled in Connerly’s favor, but the delay proved costly because organizers were trying to beat a cutoff date. Blocking these initiatives from the ballot is probably the only way supporters of racial preferences can prevail: Voters tend to believe in equal opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities, but not in the enforcing of equal outcomes. The good news is that the Colorado Civil Rights Initiative is set to go up for a vote. Arizona and Nebraska, the other two states targeted for 2008, have qualifying deadlines in July. As for Oklahoma and Missouri, Connerly promises that he’ll be back—we hope with three more victories under his belt.

■ In most of the country, Catholic education is in retreat as sparser attendance and higher costs force parishes to shutter schools. But things are sunnier in Arizona, where the Diocese of Phoenix has opened six new Catholic schools in the past ten years and plans to open at least five more. The difference? Arizona offers tax credits for donations to scholarship funds—religious or secular—making it possible for half of the students in Phoenix’s Catholic schools to receive financial assistance. Inevitably, the ACLU sued to undo the tax credits, but it was defeated. Other states should follow Arizona’s example.

■ Michael Antonovich, conservative Republican member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, has issued yet another of his analyses of the county’s Department of Public Social Services figures. He concludes that nearly 25 percent of the county’s welfare and food-stamp benefits go to the children of illegal aliens, at an annual cost of over $400 million.

Says Antonovich: “The total cost for illegal immigrants to county taxpayers far exceeds $1 billion a year, not including the millions of dollars for education.” Long a thorn in the side of bureaucrats and liberals (he tried to organize a welcome-home-from-prison party for one of the LAPD officers convicted in the Rodney King case), Antonovich is one of those gadflies that every political system needs. The welfare numbers he quotes look sound, and have not been refuted. That such sums of public money should be spent on people who have no business being in our country speaks to an appalling dereliction of duty on the part of our government. That most citizens accept that dereliction so passively speaks to how little concern we have for our own citizenship laws, and how cowed we have been by the “diversity” lobbies and race hustlers.

■ Two hundred–plus people blocked traffic in six spots in New York City to protest the acquittal of the detectives who shot Sean Bell, and were briefly arrested. “If they’re not going to arrest the guilty,” declared a spokesman for Al Sharpton’s National Action Network, “they’ll have to arrest the innocent.” How come Sharpton got cuffed, then? The Tawana Brawley hoaxer and slanderer, and the rabble-rouser whose acolyte torched and shot up Freddy’s Fashion Mart, has another blot on his escutcheon: deadbeat. Sharpton owes $1.5 million in city and federal taxes, and his National Action Network owes tens of thousands in workers’ compensation and unemployment insurance. No wonder Barack Obama practically has a foot in the White House: When Al Sharpton is the face of ordinary black protest, it’s not hard to look like Francis of Assisi.

■ A 6–3 majority of the U.S. Supreme Court upheld an Indiana voter-identification law. The decision in *Crawford* v. *Marion County Election Board* underscores the importance of nominating conservative justices who value judicial restraint.

Newsweek
IN BURMA
NIXON'S SHADOW

Scare Tacticians

As we all know, the GOP is the party of fear. Republicans scare Americans out of voting their hopes, their dreams, their noblest aspirations—all of the things that, we are told, the Democrats appeal to. According to a recent *Newsweek* cover story, which breaks new proctological ground for the depth and breadth of its butt-kissing of the Obama campaign, “the Republican Party has been successfully scaring voters since 1968, when Richard Nixon built a Silent Majority out of lower- and middle-class folks frightened or disturbed by hippies and student radicals and blacks rioting in the inner cities.” Apparently Rick Perlstein’s much-discussed new book, *Nixonland*, makes a similar argument.

Indeed, it seems few arguments are less controversial. Al Gore rails with vein-popping intensity about how George W. Bush has “played on our fears.” If you Google “fear-mongering” and “Democrats,” you’ll get about 490,000 results, and nearly every hit for the first few pages (after which, pundits trying to confirm their theses are absolved from seeking more data) is about *Republican* fear-mongering.

There are at least three questions here. Are the historical claims accurate? Do Republicans continue to play on people’s fears today? And, if so, what’s wrong with that?

Well, history can be in the eye of the beholder. But if we’re setting out to chronicle the politicization of fear in the modern era, it might strike some as odd to start with 1968 when, four years earlier, the Democratic party ran its infamous “daisy” ad suggesting that a vote for AuH_2O might well render The Children into radioactive cinder.

As for today, sure it’s true. The GOP uses fear. Chiefly, it uses fear of terrorists to focus voters on the differences between Republican and Democratic policies. Whether this is irresponsible is, again, in the eye of the beholder, but you probably think the answer hinges to a large extent on how real the terrorist threat is. More on that in a second.

But first, realize that to concede Republicans use fear is not to say they are alone in doing so. John Edwards’s “two Americas” shtick conjured phantasms of corporate fat cats taking your job and your health care and then kicking down your door and eating the last of your leftover pizza. How Al Gore can emit so much CO_2 about Bush’s fear-mongering without spontaneously bursting into flames of hypocrisy is beyond me, given that his whole post-vice-presidency has been dedicated to scaring the bejeebers out of the whole planet about global warming. “Hurricanes! Cyclones! Famine!” These are the wages of Gaia’s wrath, saith this supposedly high-road prophet. While we’re at it, let the record show that a former boss of his said all sorts of scary stuff about Saddam Hussein—particularly while that boss was being impeached.

Oh, and who was it again who ran those classic fear-mongering “3:00 A.M. in the White House” ads against Barack Obama?

Liberals, Democrats, Clintonites, and environmentalists would respond to all of these counter-examples by saying I’m missing the point. This isn’t fear-mongering, they’d say; it’s “raising awareness” and “highlighting the issue.” Which is just another way of saying there’s a double standard for Republicans. But you don’t need me to tell you that. You could just read *Newsweek*.

—JONAH GOLDBERG

THE WEEK...

More than half of the states have passed laws requiring the presentation of some form of identification in order to vote. It is easy to imagine a more activist Court overturning those democratically enacted laws based on a few liberal groups' spurious claims of democracy denied. Obama has been a fierce critic of voter-ID laws, and he wasted no time condemning the Court's decision, arguing that Indiana's law "places an unfair burden on Indiana residents who are poor, elderly, disabled, or members of minority groups." All this over something as simple as showing a photo ID to prevent voter fraud. Talk about the soft bigotry of low expectations.

■ For decades Burma has been an impoverished autarchy, ruled by the army. If you were not a dissident, like Nobelist Aung San Suu Kyi, or a member of a rebellious ethnic minority, you could live a life of miserable stasis—so long as nothing bad happened. The cyclone that hit the Irrawaddy Delta in early May was very bad indeed: Perhaps 30,000 people died in the initial havoc. But many more have died, and will die, from hunger, thirst, disease, and pollution associated with sea water and corpses, thanks largely to the Burmese military. The generals fear the spectacle of competent foreigners giving assistance, and they resist any distractions from a constitutional referendum that is designed to entrench their power. So Burmese die while other Burmese cast meaningless votes.

■ Who governs Lebanon? Since last November, the Lebanese have been trying and failing to elect a president. In the political vacuum, the two main contenders for power are the prime minister, Fuad Siniora, a Sunni Muslim, and Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, head of Hezbollah, the Shiite Muslim militia that is a foreign-policy arm of Iran. Probably inspired by the Iraqi government's assault on Shiite militias similarly grabbing power, Siniora took measures to curb Hezbollah. This test of strength proved miscalculated. Hezbollah saw its chance to stage at least the preliminaries of a coup. Its gunmen took to the streets, and so far there are over 40 dead, some Sunnis and others Hezbollahis. The Lebanese army is refusing orders to enforce the law by tackling Hezbollah, and Siniora is a more or less hapless prisoner in his office building. Equally hapless, the United Nations has several thousand troops in the country, but they make sure to be uninvolved. The United States and several Arab countries are desperately trying to broker a compromise to deflect civil war. Should Hezbollah finalize its coup and end up governing Lebanon, Iran will have won a famous victory, and there will be many more dead in the country, and maybe farther afield too.

■ After Awad al-Qiq was killed in a recent Israeli air strike in Gaza, he was unmasked as the Hannah Montana of the elite U.N.-run Rafah Prep Boys School: popular headmaster and science teacher by day, bomb-maker by night. The terrorist group Palestinian Islamic Jihad mourned Qiq as "chief leader" of its "engineering unit," which builds the missiles that the group launches at Israel, and reported that he has gone to paradise, where he presumably spends his time teaching physics and chemistry to his allotment of 72 virgins. Qiq's family, according to Reuters, "denied he had any militant [that's Reutersspeak for *terrorist*] links at all, despite a profusion of Islamic Jihad posters at his home," and said they were waiting to hear from the U.N. about a pension.

■ In October 2000 the destroyer U.S.S. *Cole* was attacked and damaged by two suicide bombers in a plot hatched by al-Qaeda. Seventeen U.S. sailors died and 39 were injured. This happened while the *Cole* was refueling in Aden, which is the main port of Yemen, the poorest and most backward state on the Arabian peninsula (ranked 153rd among the 177 countries listed in the U.N.'s human-development index). Six of the *Cole* plotters were tried in Yemeni courts and given long sentences. Mysteriously, all either escaped or were released by the Yemenis. Jamal al-Badawi, a ringleader of the plot, was actually sentenced to death. His sentence was commuted; he escaped from jail and was recaptured twice; then he was officially released by the Yemenis in 2007. After U.S. protests he was re-arrested, but it is widely suspected that his cell is empty. FBI director Robert Mueller visited Yemen in April to ask for extradition of al-Badawi and the other plotters, but the Yemenis declared that their constitution does not allow extradition. Our good friends the Saudis are poor Yemen's rich next-door neighbors. Would it be too much to ask for them to help us get our hands on these terrorists? Yes, it probably would.

■ The Muslim world does not seem to suffer from those tiresome conflicts between science and religion that have vexed Christendom these past 400 years. Thus, Muslim scientists and clerics found themselves of one mind when recently assembled in Qatar for a conference titled "Mecca, the Center of the Earth, Theory and Practice." This was one of a series of events aimed at deriving tenets of science from the Koran. Some of the results had Western observers scratching their heads. A Muslim geologist, for example, asserted that Mecca's longitude (39° 49' E) was in perfect alignment with magnetic north (which wanders from about 110° to 114° W). The scholars also claim to have proved that Mecca is the true center of the earth, though how the surface of a sphere can possess a center is lost on us. The science on offer was not all theoretical, though. The conference also promoted a Muslim wristwatch, whose hands sweep counter-clockwise. Presumably this is meant to accord with the right-to-left direction of Arabic script. Or is it perhaps a hint that the world is headed in the wrong time direction?

■ Zimbabwean junta head honcho Robert Mugabe has slithered into a runoff election against opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai. Tsvangirai outpolled Mugabe in the presidential election, and it is quite likely that an honest count would have given him enough votes to preclude a runoff. Cynics observe that Tsvangirai must have overtaken Mugabe by a hefty margin for the latter to have condescended to a runoff. Law required that the second round of voting be held within 21 days of the first, but Mugabe's minions have delayed, protesting

Are Democrats Less Patriotic Than Republicans?

OVER THE COURSE of a generation, the far right in America has peddled a story that says conservatives love their country more than liberals. That's patently false. But it's worth asking: What *is* true patriotism?

IS IT PATRIOTIC—or even conservative—to support an aggressive expansion of government power to eavesdrop?

IS IT PATRIOTIC—or even conservative—to support tax and fiscal policies that let the wealthiest off the hook, put more burdens on the middle class, and create a massive debt and deficit for the next generation to clean up?

IS IT PATRIOTIC—or even conservative—to throw America's great military into wars and nation-building adventures that have flimsy justification and no definable end?

IS IT PATRIOTIC—or even conservative—to despoil, for short-term profit, America's natural resources and rob our children of their rightful bounty?

We're Democrats, and we've written a little book about the moral code of patriotism. We believe that true patriotism belongs to neither party—but that there are false patriots in both. We believe that true patriotism means progress, pragmatism, and country above self. And we think there are conservatives who would agree. What do *you* believe?

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that it could take up to a year to organize the runoff. Meanwhile, Tsvangirai has fled for his life to South Africa, and several of his colleagues, including trade unionists and a newly elected lawmaker, have been carried off into Mugabe's dungeons. The London *Telegraph* reports that Tsvangirai's supporters have been subjected to a retribution ritual called "the baptism of traitors," in which they are bound, beaten, and burned, often having their arms broken, while onlookers are advised by Mugabe's captains that a similar fate awaits all opposition supporters. Zimbabwe's failed national institutions are mirrored by failed international institutions: From the Southern African Development Community to the United Nations to the influential government of Thabo Mbeki in South Africa, not a finger has stirred in defense of Zimbabwe. The runoff election will therefore take place under conditions of Mugabe's choosing, and Zimbabwe will suffer for it.

■ Saparmurat Atayevich Niyazov, the colorful president of Turkmenistan from 1990 to 2006, got everyone's attention by giving his nation's calendar a makeover, renaming the months and days after himself, his mother, and various historical figures he favored. Niyazov also erected golden statues of himself around the country, and fulfilled every author's fantasy by making his own book of spiritual guidance compulsory reading in Turkmenistan's schools. Now the country has a new president, with a more down-to-earth approach. Gurbanguly Myalikgulievich Berdimukhammedov, who became president in February 2007, has restored the old calendar names and set about dismantling his predecessor's cult of personality. We congratulate him on his good sense, and, well, conservatism, and promise to do our utmost to spell his name correctly.

■ Boris Johnson is already a celebrity known to most British people by his first name only. That is a rare distinction. Forty-three now, he made his unusual way to the top by appearing on talk shows, and hamming it up with a distinctive mix of comic self-deprecation and an intelligence that owes nothing to political correctness, and therefore has rocked many a boat. Besides, he has a shock of blond hair that defies the barber. The Conservatives took a gamble running such a character in the recent election for mayor of London, and the gamble paid off. Boris got 10 percent more of the votes than his opponent Ken Livingstone, who had won this election twice before. But Livingstone is a hardline Trotskyite, a man who first supported the IRA and now supports the Muslim jihadis. Boris made him look like a relic from the Stone Age of the Left, and he has since wasted no time entering city hall to hack away at its entrenched socialism. Cronies and unnecessary bureaucrats, he promised all in his own idiom, would be "humanely euthanized." For the first time in a decade, the future looks Conservative in Britain.

■ Where have we heard this story before? An angry populist politician with no time for economics demands protection for jobs at home—jobs that are being "stolen" by cheap labor in India. The odd twist is that this politician is himself in India. Raj Thackeray, who came up through India's fascist Shiv Sena movement before launching his own boutique political party, wants to pass a law to reserve 80 percent of the jobs in his home state of Maharashtra to natives of that territory. He may well succeed. Maharashtra is home to India's financial capital, Bombay (Thackeray and his ilk insist on "Mumbai," the Marathi name for the sprawling megapolis), and the support enjoyed by this dull doorknob of a man in South Asia's most sophisticated city is a reminder that the liberalization of India, which has helped lift many millions out of misery, is a weighty achievement that stands on fragile human legs. But Thackeray's illiberalism is no exotic abomination. His spirit and rhetoric are very much in evidence when Barack Obama promises to disrupt free trade in North America and when Hillary Clinton threatens to seize oil companies' profits. If the Democrats need a more efficient way to cook up crackpot protectionist schemes, they could always outsource the work to India.

■ We extend our congratulations to Mrs. Michelle Duggar of Tontitown, Ark., who has learned that she is expecting her 18th child. The new addition will join seven sisters and ten brothers, including two sets of twins. All the children are home-schooled, and each learns to play both violin and piano. Their father, Jim Bob Duggar, is a realtor who served in the Arkansas House of Representatives from 1999 to 2002. The Duggar family's philoprogenitiveness has aroused a quite astonishing level of scorn and disgust on the anti-natalist Left: "This kind of indiscriminate, excessive breeding is disgraceful," etc. Astonishing that such love of life and natural fruitfulness should draw such wrath; encouraging that children are still regarded as an unqualified blessing, in any quantity, by at least some Americans.

■ America is fascinated by Niko Bellic, a blizzard of pixels taking the form of an imaginary immigrant from Eastern Europe, the protagonist of *Grand Theft Auto IV*. The *GTA* series is admired for its technical achievement and vilified for its amorality. At their best, computer games are stylish and clever; at their worst they become a mindless Skinner box, sound and fury signifying zilch. The quality of a video game is proportional to the sense of immersion it generates—but in what shall we immerse ourselves? If the reviews are to be believed, the makers of *GTA* have grown weary of their familiar hookers-'n'-carjacking

JOHNSON: LEON NEAL/AFP THACKERAY: RAJESH NIRGUDE/AFP

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routine, broadening their digital palette and forcing their antihero into moral dilemmas in which he must choose the least-bad option from a menu of criminal unpleasantness. It is true that we'd rather see young people immersing themselves in the music of Bach or the drama of Shakespeare than in the shenanigans of Niko Bellic, but we are also reminded of noir novelist Mickey Spillane's response to critics who called his work garbage: "But it's *good* garbage."

■ "How small of all that human hearts endure / That part which laws or kings can cause or cure." So wrote Samuel Johnson, but his words do not seem to have penetrated Ecuador, where a hot-blooded parliamentarian named Maria Soledad Vela proposes to insert in that nation's constitution a provision guaranteeing a woman's right to "el disfrute sexual"—sexual pleasure. A noble goal, to be sure, but what are the chances of obtaining it from a clause in the constitution? No worse than the chances of obtaining it from a man, perhaps; still, after some prodding, Ms. Soledad Vela explained that what she had in mind was overcoming a "masculine society" in which the woman is considered merely a "reproductive apparatus" while the man hogs all the fun. Again, while this concept is admirable, it seems out of place in a nation's fundamental law. Consider what a broad-constructionist judge might make of such a clause!

■ In our last issue we alerted you to the death in Baghdad of Staff Sgt. Ronald Blystone, whose image appeared on a 2005 cover of NATIONAL REVIEW. The family of the 34-year-old Bronze Star recipient, who was on his third tour in Iraq, has set up an educational fund for his three children. Donations can be mailed to Blystone Educational Fund, BanCorp South, P.O. Box 4023, Springfield, Mo. 65808. Please consider contributing, in memory of a hero who sacrificed all for his country.

POLITICS

Obama Victorious

BARACK OBAMA's big win in North Carolina and his slim loss in Indiana on May 6 brought him yet closer to the nomination, and brought us face-to-face with several aspects of the rest of the campaign.

One is the full-court press of the press on Obama's side. After May 6 the press begged/ordered Hillary Clinton to pack it up. Nothing must throw the nominee-presumptive of the Democratic party, which is also the press's party, off his stride. Yes, the media have given some attention to various Obama headaches, such as his pastor and mentor Jeremiah Wright (how could it fail to when Wright made his barbaric yawp before the National Press Club?). But Obama is their man. Like them, he is highly educated and left of center; unlike most of them, he is black, a quality to which all of them defer. Time now for journalists to put their shoulders to their laptops and make history.

In the aftermath of his victory, Obama showed them how this is to be done. Speaking to his supporters in Raleigh, N.C., Obama decried "the politics of division and distraction"—Republican division and Republican distraction. McCain, he warned, will use "the very same playbook that his side has used time after time." What are the plays in that playbook? "Pouncing on every gaffe and association and fake controversy." In one swoop, Obama sought to rule his firebrand minister, his bomber chum Bill Ayers, his sour, aggrieved wife Michelle, and his crooked Chicago crony Tony Rezko *hors de combat*. Only Obama's audacious hopes for change will be fit topic for discussion. But since another of the GOP's tactics is pinning "names and labels . . . on everyone who doesn't agree with all their ideas," even discussion of issues will be out of bounds, if Republicans reject Obama's solutions, or identify them for what they are: nostrums out of liberalism's closet.

In victory Obama has recovered his orator's mode, emitting the sonorous platitudes that have taken him so far, and that had been momentarily in eclipse during his rumble with Hillary Clinton. "I trust the American people's desire to no longer be defined by our differences." *E pluribus unum*—who could quarrel with that? But politics is the way we express and navigate our differences, so we don't have to do it, as other nations do, by coups or riots. John McCain and the GOP should not be intimidated into surrendering their all-American right to say what they think, and why it is right for the country—even if Obama and the press chide them for it.

HOUSING

Do Nothing, Congress

DEFYING a White House veto threat, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a pair of housing bills that would reward foolish lenders and borrowers, weaken the reputation of American securities, and punish renters.

The centerpiece of the first bill is a $300 billion mortgage-insurance fund that would allow the Federal Housing Administration to insure an estimated 500,000 troubled home loans, at a cost to taxpayers of $2.7 billion. Under this bill, lenders can get the FHA to insure a souring loan by agreeing to write down the loan's value by as much as 15 percent. This works out well for those lenders who let their standards plummet as housing prices soared, as well as for borrowers who took out loans they couldn't afford. It doesn't work out so well for taxpayers who exercised better judgment.

It doesn't work out well for investors in mortgage-backed securities, either. These investors enter into contracts that specify the circumstances under which loan servicers can work out deals with cash-strapped borrowers. These contracts allow investors to know approximately how much their investments are worth. But the Democrats' bill would throw even this small measure of certainty out the window, by giving broad protection from legal liability to loan servicers who write down mortgages in violation of these contracts.

As the Competitive Enterprise Institute's John Berlau has

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In the new issue of *Policy Review*

Energy Independence Isn't Very Green

Conflicting priorities are confusing policy

[I]n pleading the case for lowered oil consumption, energy security advocates gratefully accepted a new rationale — concerns about climate change. In 1973, those concerns were barely a blip on the political radar screen, but they have grown steadily since about 1988. "Stop global warming" has become a remarkably effective rallying cry, even inspiring award-winning documentaries and TV specials. Commercial interests have also latched onto this movement. Automobile makers find it easier to market gas-electric hybrid cars in the interest of saving the planet from excessive warming rather than saving the country from Middle Eastern extremists. The ethanol lobby, too, identifies its raison d'être more with greening the planet than with energy security. Combating climate change somehow seems more inclusive and less confrontational than mere energy security. For all these reasons, advocates of the latter (let's call them the "oil independents") have eagerly accepted a strategic partnership with the climate change establishment (the "climate greens"). Unfortunately, however, the partnership rests on unstable ground.

—Steve Stein

Taxing Private Equity

Anomalies of a Byzantine tax code

The House bill is yet another reminder of the problem of having different tax rates for different types of income. Whenever capital gains are taxed at a different rate from so-called ordinary income (or corporate income, for that matter), economic resources will be devoted to reclassifying income. Fewer and similar rates of tax would reduce the resources wasted trying to game the system. In the case of capital gains tax, it is a moot point whether the rate should be lower or higher than ordinary income tax or indeed whether it should be taxed at all. Since its introduction in 1921, no other tax has attracted as much controversy or been changed as often by Congress. Carried interests may be the most economically efficient way to reward private equity managers, but the form of remuneration should be decided on its economic merits, not to satisfy some legal definition of income.

—Adam Creighton

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noted, middle-class investors who own mortgage-backed securities through their 401(k) accounts and mutual funds would lose billions. What's worse, giving loan servicers a free hand to alter the terms of these contracts would contribute to an atmosphere of uncertainty on Wall Street at a time when uncertainty over the value of debt-backed securities is fueling a credit crunch.

A separate housing bill would provide states with $15 billion in grants and loans to purchase foreclosed homes. The ostensible purpose of this bill is to allow states to prevent foreclosures from blighting neighborhoods and driving down property values. In reality, the bill is a massive subsidy to lenders who made bad loans and now find themselves struggling to find buyers willing to take foreclosed homes off their hands.

Homeowners rightly worry about foreclosures in their neighborhood. Unless the empty houses are promptly purchased, property values in the area can fall so far that homeowners owe more on their mortgages than their houses are worth. But the Democrats' solution to this problem would have the perverse effect of increasing foreclosures. A lender who might otherwise have worked out a deal with a struggling homeowner would have an incentive to foreclose instead, because he would be safe in the knowledge that the state has the money and the mandate to buy foreclosed properties right away.

If 'doing nothing' means preventing the Democrats from making the housing problem much worse, then it is by far the better alternative.

Nor should the government prop up housing prices that are still well above historical averages. The Democrats' bill punishes renters by enabling the states to compete with them for foreclosed properties in the housing market. Furthermore, if the bill has its intended effect of stabilizing the prices of homes that are not in foreclosure, renters who were waiting for housing prices to fall before buying would be punished for their prudence.

President Bush has threatened to veto both of these bills, and he would be right to do so. Fortunately, neither passed the House with a veto-proof margin, nor would either make it out of the Senate with enough votes to override a veto. The Democrats will try to force the administration to veto the bills so they can accuse Bush of "doing nothing" to alleviate the housing crisis. But if "doing nothing" means preventing the Democrats from making the problem much worse, then it is by far the better alternative.

ISRAEL

Sixty Years of Success

JUST 60 years ago, David Ben-Gurion declared that after a lapse of two millennia the state of Israel had resumed its existence. There was dancing in the streets of this revived state. At the time, the Nazi Holocaust had just dealt Jews what was virtually a deathblow, and survivors might have been expected never to recover. In a magnificent, perhaps desperate, assertion of human vitality, they instead came together to create their own state. Jews were at last in a position to take their future into their own hands. An ancient identity, complete with its long-since-unspoken language of Hebrew, acquired a modern expression. There is no other example in history of a national comeback like this.

By now, the success of the experiment speaks for itself. Since the state's creation, the number of Israeli Jews has risen tenfold, to some 6 million today. The number of Israeli Arabs has increased in similar proportions, to over a million. Arabs are represented in parliament and the cabinet, and in the higher ranks of the diplomatic service and the military. Though the country is only about 8,000 square miles, and devoid of natural resources, it has a first-world economy. It is a leader in the sciences, in technology, and in medicine, with more than its fair share of Nobel prizes. Its art, music, and literature stand comparison with any elsewhere.

Israel is a country that the United Nations voted originally to approve, and there is no other example of this either. What had formerly been the British Mandate of Palestine was henceforth to be Israel and a Palestinian-Arab state, side by side. At that time, after the Second World War, the colonized everywhere were beginning to gain their independence from Western empires. Israel's opportunity was part of that shift in power, but, though Jews were victims of murderous European racism, they were hardly third-worlders. Rejecting Israeli national claims and rights, and misrepresenting Jews as the new colonizers, Arab states since 1948 have never concealed their intention to wipe out Israel, and restore its territory to the House of Islam.

Israel's fortunes therefore have a tragic dimension. A million and more Jews were obliged to flee to Israel from Arab lands where their communities had lived from time immemorial. And the Arabs? In one campaign after another, Arab leaders and their armies have been humiliated, and the Palestinians find themselves fragmented and wrecked. A nuclear-armed Iran and its proxies of Hezbollah and Hamas are only the latest in the ongoing run of existential threats. Israel has no choice but to defend itself whenever attacked, no matter that often it is irrationally criticized for doing so, and nowhere more maliciously than in the United Nations, its onetime sponsor. Once the Jew was the symbolic outcast in much of the world, and there is a sense in which Israel has become the world's Jew.

No matter. As intended, Israel has served the purpose of placing the future of Jews in Jewish hands. They are probably too grown-up at 60 to dance in the streets again, but they could be forgiven if they did.

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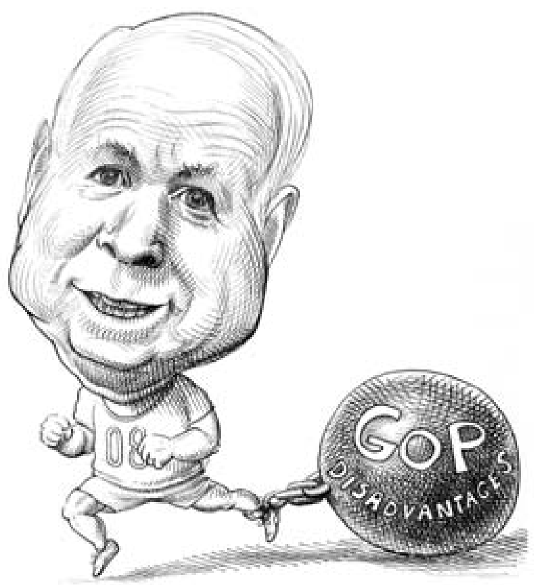

ROMAN GENN

■ 2008 ■

A Heap of Troubles

And how John McCain should try to surmount them

RAMESH PONNURU

REPUBLICANS have spent months delighting in the divisions among Democrats. They fear Senator Obama's potential to win a landslide in November less than they did when he won the Iowa caucuses at the beginning of January. They think he has a number of vulnerabilities, including his difficulty winning working-class-white votes, his ties to Jeremiah Wright, and his pronounced liberalism. But Republicans shouldn't kid themselves: At this point, Obama has to be favored to beat John McCain.

Even as Clinton and Obama have kept battling, national polls have shown McCain neck and neck with the Illinois senator. It's going to get worse for McCain. Once everyone sees that Obama has finally dispatched Clinton, his victory will probably give him a boost in the polls—and even more favorable news coverage than he has usually gotten. Obama will be able to start courting the general electorate, not just Democrats. His allies will start blanketing the airwaves with attacks on McCain. Their goal will be to define him in the public mind negatively, and early, the way Bill Clinton defined Bob Dole early in 1996.

Republicans should count themselves lucky that they are in the hunt at all. It is rare for a two-term president to have a successor from his party. Al Gore lost in 2000, and he had peace and seeming prosperity on his side. This year, economic anxiety and a still-unpopular war are adding to the time-for-a-change sentiment that the public would normally feel. The Bush administration's reputation for incompetence is not helping, either.

The evidence for a Democratic edge is everywhere. President Bush has been unpopular for a long time. A record number of Americans think the country is on the wrong track. The polls show that more people identify with the Democrats than with the Republicans. On most issues they trust the Democrats more. The high turnout in the Democratic primaries—it was higher than the Republican turnout even when both nominations were contested—suggests a lot of enthusiasm among Democrats. They can't wait for the Bush era to be over. Another sign of enthusiasm: Obama's campaign is awash in money, and so are allied organizations.

Nobody is sure how Obama's race will affect the election, but it could add to the Democratic advantage. Some voters will be uncomfortable electing a black president. But others will be excited by the chance to make history; attacks on Obama will be inhibited; and black voters will turn out in larger numbers than usual to vote for him.

While McCain is the underdog in this election, there are at least seven things he can do to even the odds.

1. Defuse the age issue. As Jonathan Martin recently pointed out in *Politico*, "old" is the first thing a plurality of Americans think when they think about McCain. Leno and Letterman are reinforcing that impression. Howard Dean says that Democrats are too "ethical" to raise the issue, but then says that McCain is "from the 1940s." Obama took an opportunity to say that McCain has "lost his bearings."

The McCain campaign reacted angrily, which was a mistake, drawing attention to the topic and looking touchy. A vigorous campaign schedule, publicity for his still-active mother, and a few well-timed jokes would be a better approach. (McCain has already cut an ad with his mother.) Pledging to serve only one term, a step his advisers have debated, might also provide some reassurance, as would selecting a running mate who would be ready from Day One. Making Obama's inexperience an issue, meanwhile, would put a positive spin on his years.

2. Raise money. A few months ago, there was some discussion of how different the electoral map could look this year: Virginia could go for the Democrats, or New Jersey for the Republicans. That talk has died down, especially as Obama has started to seem like a conventional liberal. But Obama's fundraising could still force Republicans to play defense in places they usually take for granted. As one strategist puts it: "[Obama's] natural crossover appeal doesn't let him expand the map. His superior financial resources let him expand the map."

McCain does not need to raise as much money as Obama in order to win the election. But he does need enough money to compete.

3. Develop a domestic policy based on reforming institutions to serve the middle class. On campaign finance and earmarks, McCain has credentials as a reformer hostile to business as usual. But in neither of these areas can reforms tangibly improve the lives of voters. Americans respect McCain as a patriot, and his positions on social issues are politically more attractive than those of Obama. But he needs to have something to offer voters to offset the subsidies that the Democrats are peddling.

McCain is almost there on health care, the top domestic issue—which is to say the top issue—of this election. His plan makes it easier for individuals to own their own insurance policies, thus addressing middle-class concerns about affordability and control. But he has only started to publicize his plan, and has not done so in reformist or middle-class terms.

McCain's tax cuts, meanwhile, are neither particularly reformist nor pitched to the middle class. He will not be credible as a reformer unless he takes on the tax code. And no plan to revive economic growth will help McCain unless it also addresses the economic anxieties of middle-income workers.

4. Reconsider global warming. McCain wants to fight global warming by imposing caps on carbon emissions, and he wants cheap energy. He can't have both. McCain cannot walk away from his commitment to fighting global warming, but he needs to find a different way to do it. Otherwise his energy policy will make him an enemy of middle-class aspirations, and make it impossible for him to exploit a weakness of Obama's.

5. Pick a vice-presidential candidate who reinforces the candidate's pro-life, reformist message. A pro-choice veep would deflate Republican enthusiasm for McCain, which is not off the charts as it is. It could also cause trouble for McCain at the convention. The main value of a vice president for McCain should be to underscore the idea that he is a different kind of Republican—not because he is to the left of the party on social issues, but because he is, again, a patriotic reformer who wants to expand Americans' opportunities.

6. Get some distance from Bush and the existing Republican brand. In 2000, when Republicans were doing much better than they are today, George W. Bush did not run a wholly conventional Republican campaign. He hit Al Gore from the right only after establishing that he was not Newt Gingrich. In 2008, it is even more important not to look like a generic Republican politician.

McCain need not go out of his way to criticize Bush and congressional Republicans. Doing that would encourage a sense of every-man-for-himself panic among Republicans, and would probably drive both Bush's and McCain's numbers lower. And while McCain should talk about the many times he has broken with his party, he should look for other ways to re-brand himself. Have I mentioned a one-term pledge?

7. Go after Obama's strengths. The night he won big in North Carolina and narrowly lost in Indiana, a set of events taken by the pundits as the end for Hillary Clinton, Obama attacked the McCain campaign: "His plan to win in November appears to come from the very same playbook that his side has used time after time in election after election. . . . The same efforts to distract us from the issues that affect our lives by pouncing on every gaffe and association and fake controversy in the hope that the media will play along. The attempts to play on our fears and exploit our differences to turn us against each other for pure political gain."

Obama wasn't just trying to preemptively define McCain's general-election campaign as illegitimate. He was directly attacking McCain's reputation as a different, nobler kind of politician. McCain ought to respond in kind. McCain has not, in truth, run a low-road campaign. But Obama's posturing as a unifying and non-partisan figure really is a fraud: He is a down-the-line liberal partisan who has rarely shown political courage on anything. Clinton could not really raise this point in the Democratic primaries, but McCain can and should call him on it.

Most of these seven steps would build on one another. A creative new domestic agenda, for example, would separate McCain from the status quo party while also making him seem young at heart. If McCain runs the right campaign, and keeps his lucky coin in his pocket, then Obama might just be the one who's bitter come November. **NR**

■ **2008 II**

Obama's White Problem

It could cling to him all the way to November

BYRON YORK

Charlotte, N.C.

CAN Democrats unite after the long and bitter primary battle between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton? The question most often asked is whether disappointed Clinton supporters will shift their allegiance to Obama. But there is also the question of whether Obama's supporters will welcome them.

There are nearly a thousand hardcore Obama fans here in the Ovens Auditorium in Charlotte on this night before the North Carolina primary. They've come to hear not the man himself but his wife, Michelle Obama, who is headlining the Obama campaign's get-out-the-vote effort. It's a fair guess that almost every single one of them, at least the ones who are old enough, voted for Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996. Some of them supported Hillary Clinton early in the Democratic race. Talk to them now, though, and it's clear the love is gone.

"I'm really disappointed in Hillary, with the lies that she's coming up with," a woman named Evanda tells me. I ask her what in particular caught her attention, and she starts laughing about the Bosnia "dodging bullets" story. A woman named Clair adds, "She has done some things that I really don't like. When Barack wins the nomination, the Republicans can go out and play on what she has already brought out—she has already crippled him." Another woman, Ella, adds, "There has been a lot of divisiveness that has come out of her campaign."

And don't get them started on Bill. "I used to like him," says Clair. "He was one of my favorite presidents. But I think this race has brought out something in him that I didn't know was there, because he started to play the race card. He just turned me off." Clair's husband, Alan, chimes in that the Clintons "are a little bit desperate now to cling to power." And a woman sitting in the first row, Elloree, says, "It just goes to show you that a man of his stature—of what I thought was his stature—can stoop so low for power."

Sentiments like that have created a certain amount of bad blood between the two camps. "I wouldn't use the word 'hostility,'" Jerry Meek, chairman of the North Carolina Democratic party, tells me. "I would use the word 'tension.'" If that's right, then what's cooking in the Ovens Auditorium might be called *hostile tension*, or *tense hostility*, and there's a lot of it. Not a particularly good recipe for party unity.

YES
WE
HOPE
♥ MICHELLE
Oba

Kvetching about what 'they' have done

T. ORTEGA GAINES/CHARLOTTE OBSERVER/MCT

The next day, Obama wins North Carolina in a blowout, but there's another huge gap between his support—concentrated in the highly educated Research Triangle and among black voters—and Clinton's strength among working-class whites. As impressive as Obama's 14-point victory is, it does nothing to dispel concerns among some Democrats that Obama will have a hard time with those white voters in the general election. He wins just 37 percent of whites in North Carolina, which is slightly better than he did in Ohio (34 percent), an exact match of the results in Pennsylvania, and a tad less than he won in Missouri (39 percent).

If you're a Democratic strategist, you've got to be worried about those numbers. "We cannot win with eggheads and African-Americans," analyst and Clinton adviser Paul Begala said on CNN, describing precisely how Obama won North Carolina. "That's the Dukakis coalition, which carried ten states and gave us four years of the first George Bush." It was also the Kerry coalition: The Massachusetts senator won 41 percent of white votes in 2004. Given their 90-plus percent support from blacks, Democrats don't have to win a majority of whites. Bill Clinton won 43 percent of the white vote in 1996, but Obama will have to do better than he has in a number of key states.

The next week, despite wearing the same sort of flag pin he once derided as a token of phony patriotism and invoking his American grandfather's service in World War II, Obama loses big to Clinton in West Virginia, with a weak showing among white voters. Obama semi-ignored the state and spent almost no time there, betting that one of the lesser-known realities of American politics—that no Democrat since 1916 has won the White House without winning West Virginia—would not constrain him this November.

Another worry is the role Michelle Obama will play in her husband's campaign. We've all heard her proud-of-my-country-for-the-first-time story, and her description of America as "downright mean." In Charlotte, she does it again. You might expect a get-out-the-vote rally to be a happy, rah-rah affair, but Mrs. Obama turns it into an hour-long kvetch. She starts with an extended complaint that her husband has been treated unfairly in the campaign, saying that each time he achieves some new success, "they" (she studiously declines to say who "they" are) raise the bar just beyond his reach. She goes on to warn that "they" are doing the same thing to most Americans, something she illustrates by telling the story of a ten-year-old girl who approached her a few months ago in South Carolina.

The girl asked to speak to Mrs. Obama after a campaign event. In a hushed tone, the girl asked, "Do you realize when your husband becomes the next president of the United States, it will be historical?" The audience laughs, assuming this is a cute-kid story, and they cheer when Mrs. Obama relates the girl's answer when asked what Obama's success would mean for her. "It means that I can imagine anything for myself," the girl said.

But if anyone thinks this is an uplifting lesson, he soon learns differently. "And then that little girl started to break down in tears," Mrs. Obama continues. "She sobbed so hard. She was crying big, huge tears. And I had to think, why is this little girl crying so hard? And I thought, you know what's going on? This little old girl gets it."

It turns out what the girl understood, according to Obama, is that the bar is being raised on her, too. "She knows that she's already five steps behind," Obama says. "She knows that her hopes for college are already dwindling." She's headed for a miserable, tear-filled life in downright-mean America, unless Barack Obama is elected president. By the end of the speech, Mrs. Obama, who makes about $300,000 a year as a community-affairs executive at the University of Chicago Hospitals, is grumbling about her own situation, complaining, as she has many times in the past, that it took her years to pay back the loans she took out to attend Princeton and Harvard Law School.

That sort of complaint hardly seems tailored to appeal to problematic working-class white voters. A few days later, Obama aides tell the *New York Times* they are sending more staff to Ohio and Pennsylvania to concentrate on precisely these Democrats. The aides acknowledge that Obama must win these states to win the White House, which is pretty much what Hillary Clinton has been saying all along. Obama's white problem is real, and it isn't going away. **NR**

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■ **SCIENCE**

Transgenic Travesty

Genetically modified crops could help poor farmers—if rich Western greens allowed it

FRED SCHWARZ

GENETICALLY modified crops should be a green activist's dream. They can increase productivity per acre, reduce the need for pesticides and herbicides, improve plants' ability to survive unfavorable conditions, and deliver key nutrients to prevent disease in those who eat them. Nowadays, with food in short supply, GM crops can be especially helpful, as they alleviate shortages where the shortages exist, literally at ground level, with no need to rely on charity from abroad.

Instead, greens hate GM crops. Here's a typical assessment from the *Huffington Post*: "There have been few experiments as reckless, overhyped and with as little potential upside as the rapid rollout of genetically modified crops." In support of these claims, opponents trot out a constantly shifting set of scientific findings that purport to demonstrate how GM crops harm the environment.

The first to be widely cited was a 1999 paper supposedly showing that pollen from GM corn was toxic to monarch butterfly caterpillars. This laboratory study was swiftly and conclusively dismantled by other scientists, who demonstrated that it bore no relation to actual conditions in the wild. As John Foster, an entomologist at the University of Nebraska, has pointed out, "traditional pesticides are actually a much bigger threat than biotech corn ever will be. A lot more monarchs die on the grills of 18-wheelers than they do from farmers who plant biotech crops." Another experiment, which suggested detrimental effects on honeybees, also turned out to be deeply flawed. Neither study has been duplicated (though greens still cite them), and no new evidence of significant harm to non-target insects has been found.

Another common charge against GM foods is that they could cause problems with allergies. The evidence: In the mid-1990s a soy plant with a Brazil-nut gene added was found to be potentially allergenic in humans. This happened long before the plant reached the market, and even though it was intended as animal feed, it never went on sale. As this incident shows, allergenic proteins are fairly easy to recognize and test for; that's why no GM food has ever caused allergies in consumers. In fact, genetic engineering is currently being used to *remove* allergens from foods, raising the possibility of allergy-free peanuts and even seafood.

Do GM crops reduce biodiversity—for example, by displacing other plants or eliminating parts of the food chain? Evidence for this is weak at best. A 2001 article published in *Nature* purported to show such a decrease caused by GM corn in Mexico, but the study was so problematic that the journal's editors retracted it the following year. Unsurprisingly, GM opponents continue to tout this paper and portray its authors as martyrs (unlike those who dissent from scientific orthodoxy on global warming, who are mocked as "deniers"). Overall, there is at least as much evidence that GM crops increase biodiversity (by reducing use of pesticides and herbicides, among other things). Here, as with the other charges against GM crops, the purported effects are tiny if not illusory, and no different from what occurs with many common practices in non-GM agriculture, while the benefits are large and quantifiable.

Genetic modification: before and after

JOHN GRESS/AP

The closest thing to a legitimate objection has to do with the risk of promoting resistance to pesticides and herbicides. One type of GM crop produces a substance that is lethal to certain pest species but safe for humans. The most common such substance is Bt, an insect-killing protein produced in nature by the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*. As a natural product, it is widely used by organic farmers, who worry about the possibility of Bt-resistant pests.

GM plants can also be made resistant to a given herbicide. Monsanto sells a number of "Roundup Ready" crops that are immune to the company's Roundup herbicide. This greatly simplifies weed control for farmers, reducing the need for tillage and, in many cases, the amount of herbicide applied. Opponents say that herbicide-resistant traits could migrate from Roundup Ready crops to the wild through wind-borne pollen, creating "superweeds" that would be hard to kill.

There's a grain of truth in these criticisms, because anytime you use herbicides and pesticides, some organisms will develop immunity. That's a fact of life in farming, and there are ways to deal with it, such as rotating crops or using a different herbicide or pesticide. But the problem of pests' developing resistance through natural selection is no greater with GM crops than it is with non-GM ones. As for "superweeds," such hybrids are very rare and far from super. In one widely publicized study, researchers collected 95,000 seeds from wild plants and found exactly two that showed GM-induced herbicide resistance. When the researchers returned to the same field the following year, they found none. As agricultural scientists have long known, random cross-breeding almost never yields offspring that can reproduce, let alone flourish.

For an example of how anti-GM activists grasp at straws, consider the case of MON 863, a corn variety modified by Monsanto to make it resistant to rootworms. It has been approved for use as animal fodder by the regulatory bodies of ten nations and even the foot-dragging European Union. A group of anti-GM scientists examined one safety study using rats and found (in the words of a sympathetic article) "a highly significant and sustained 3.3 percent decrease in body weight in males, and a 3.7 percent *increase* in females." A male rat weighs

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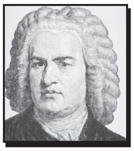

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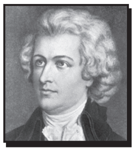

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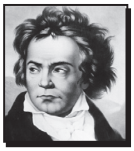

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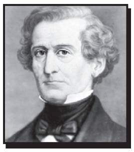

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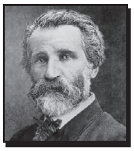

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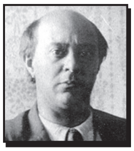

Arnold Schönberg

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roughly a pound, and a female perhaps two-thirds of that, so we're talking about half an ounce; and even so, other studies found contradictory results. Yet Greenpeace still has on its website a document called "MON 863: A Chronicle of Systematic Deception."

Despite such determined opposition, GM crops are widely cultivated in industrial and developing nations. Roughly half the world's GM farming takes place in the United States, where some 140 million acres are planted. This includes around 90 percent of America's soybeans, more than 80 percent of its cotton, and more than 60 percent of its corn. Other American GM crops include canola, squash, and alfalfa. Argentina and Brazil are the next-biggest GM planters, mostly in soybeans and cotton, with Canada following and India and China coming up fast. About 20 other countries grow GM crops—including Iran, which recently became the first nation to introduce GM rice.

Yet in the places where food shortages have hit the hardest, and where increased production could do the most good, GM crops are shunned. The only African country to permit GM crops is South Africa. Elsewhere, scare tactics by greens and fears about access to foreign markets (such as the EU, which has grudgingly dropped its prohibition on GM foods but still imposes high regulatory barriers) have led to bans, even in countries where almost all crops are consumed locally. Most Southeast Asian nations also shun GM crops, as do those in the Caribbean and the Middle East. Why do the poorest nations resist such a beneficial technology?

Simply put, it's because poor countries are the easiest for environmental activists to push around. A recent paper by Carl Pray of Rutgers, Robert Paarlberg of Wellesley, and Laurian Unnevehr of the University of Illinois examined the reception given to GM crops in different nations. In one case they studied, a GM papaya resistant to ringspot virus was eagerly accepted in Hawaii, reviving that state's papaya industry after the virus had nearly eliminated it. By reducing the virus's prevalence, the GM variety made possible the renewed cultivation of non-GM and even organic papayas as well.

In Thailand, by contrast, when a similar virus-resistant papaya was developed by Thai scientists to suit local conditions, "Greenpeace partially destroyed GM papaya trials in Khon Kaen and launched a media campaign claiming genetic pollution." Since there was no powerful interest to argue the pro-GM side, Thailand's small farmers were not able to overcome Greenpeace's campaign of intimidation and misinformation. Something similar happened when genetically modified potatoes were tried in Mexico. Green activists prevailed on McDonald's and Frito-Lay—anxious about their public image, like any big corporation—to swear off GM potatoes, They then spread a phony biodiversity controversy, and the government program promoting GM potatoes among Mexico's small farmers was abandoned.

To be sure, sometimes there are economic reasons for farmers to avoid GM crops. Travis Kavulla, formerly of National Review and now a Gates Scholar studying African history at Cambridge, says that "many Africans' main sticking point with GM seeds is that they are frequently annuals, with further seeds needing to be bought year-to-year on the returns of the crop." The first GM cotton plant introduced in India was not appropriate for the climate, and many failures resulted. (In addition to the plant's textile uses, cotton seeds are used for cooking oil and animal fodder.) But now GM cotton is spreading rapidly in India. In fact, before GM seeds became widely available, they sold for inflated prices on the black market, just as Brazilian farmers smuggled in GM soy seeds before their government legalized them.

The GM industry is everything that greens hate: big, corporate, technological, and American. That's why two of its biggest opponents in the developing world are Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe. Yet GM crops yield great benefits, which is why they have been so widely adopted wherever farmers have enough power to stand up for their interests. As Kavulla points out, "Western rhetoric on GM is something of a ruse, especially when many African governments would eagerly sell GM crops (and at higher prices) if only they had a market to do so." In this way, small farmers and consumers in Africa and Asia suffer at the hands of fastidious greens in the prosperous West. **NR**

■ CULTURE WATCH

Filth Matters

The moral squalor of Hollywood

JONAH GOLDBERG

Two things have ruthlessly conspired to prevent me from seeing as much cinema as I would like: parenthood and book-writing, which itself is a bit like giving birth to a child with painfully pointy edges and even less initiative or gratitude than a real kid. I have neither the time nor the energy to catch the buzz-generating highbrow films, at least not until after they wend their way through Hollywood's alimentary system and appear on cable or pay-per-view, already digested by every critic and blogger. And even if I disregard the spoilers and dismiss the lack of immediacy, it's difficult to watch *There Will Be Blood* when a five-year-old girl with the will of a Teamster and the eyes of Bambi insists: "There will be SpongeBob!"

Apart from having spent the last five years working on a fairly heady intellectual history, I usually need the eye-propping struts from *A Clockwork Orange* to endure anything less glandular than *Roadhouse*. If PBS's Miss Marple isn't standing in a jungle, cocking an M-16, and vowing "This time, it's personal!" she's not going to hold my attention for long.

Still, as John Dean's editors have said for years, people will always make room for mindless dreck. And so did I. Over the last few years, I've stayed abreast of my favorite shows (*Deadwood*, *The Wire*, *The Sopranos*, *House*, etc.), but I've also done a walkabout (if by walkabout you mean bunkering down into the couch) through the lands of toddler TV and teeny-bopper cinema. And I've made a perhaps unsurprising discovery: There's an enormous amount of left-wing crap out there.

And I'm not talking about the highbrow stuff that gets the attention of critics and the praise of cognoscenti. I'm talking about the stuff that is below the

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By John Fleming

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standards of the public intellectual, not worth the time of the Very Serious People who use phrases like *mise en scène* unironically and watch films the way Roman priests read goat spleens—but right up my alley!

And let's not delude ourselves: Crap matters. This is a more controversial point than you might think. Sure, we all know crap *sells*. *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry* grossed $120 million in 2007. *La Vie en Rose*: $10 million. But serious critics, on the right and the left, tend to ignore the middlebrow-and-lower fare as if it didn't matter. That's surely not the case. *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry*, for all its childish humor and crude stereotyping, probably mainstreamed the topic of gay marriage more than any dozen serious art-house flicks on the same subject.

What's amusing—or dismaying—is how indistinguishable the highbrow messages are from the lowbrow ones. In the meaty intellectual movies, we get highly polished existentialism, radical autonomy, contempt for tradition and authority, and, most of all, the elevation of youthful passion over reason.

"I feel like I've been in a coma for the past 20 years. And I'm just now waking up," declares Kevin Spacey as *American Beauty*'s Lester Burnham, who commences a "self-improvement" regimen that includes all of the staples: sexual obsessions, pot smoking, flipping off The Man.

"Janie, today I quit my job. And then I told my boss to go f— himself, and then I blackmailed him for almost $60,000. Pass the asparagus," Lester tells his daughter at the dinner table.

Countless respectable films simply recycle the same mulch of Marxist banalities, Rousseauian solecisms, and threadbare insights from *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. It can be found in everything from *Dead Poets Society* to *Brokeback Mountain*. But it keeps trickling down, below the horizon, past the point where serious critics pay serious attention.

At the end of *Legally Blonde*, for example, Reese Witherspoon's Elle Woods gives her big, rousing graduation speech. She begins, "On our very first day at Harvard, a very wise professor quoted Aristotle: 'The law is reason free from passion.' Well, no offense to Aristotle, but in my three years at Harvard I have come to find that passion is a key ingredient to the study and practice of law—and of life."

Take that, Aristotle!

The protagonist of *The Girl Next Door* is a nerdy high-schooler who's always been a decent, diligent kid. He's up for a scholarship for the student who best exemplifies "moral fiber" but, just days before he's to give a big speech to clinch the award, a smoking-hot porn star moves in next door. Hijinx, porn jokes, rutting, felonies, and the like ensue. Then when it comes time for his speech, the drugged-up—and therefore liberated—young man decides to scrap his prepared remarks, delivering instead this heroic peroration:

> Moral fiber. So what is moral fiber? I mean, it's funny. I used to think it was always telling the truth, doing good deeds . . . you know, basically being a f—ing Boy Scout. [The audience gasps.] But lately I've been seeing it differently. Now I think that moral fiber is about finding that one thing you really care about. That one special thing that means more to you than anything else in the world. [That one special thing in this case being a porn star.]
>
> And when you find her, you fight for her. You risk it all. You put her in front of everything . . . your future, your life . . . all of it. And maybe the stuff you do to help her isn't so clean. You know what? It doesn't matter. Because, in your heart, you know that the juice is worth the squeeze.
>
> That's what moral fiber's all about.

Pope Benedict couldn't have said it better.

It would be a stretch to argue that the filmmakers in question want these *movies* to be taken entirely seriously, but there is a real desire for their *messages* to be taken seriously. These little speeches are supposed to justify and legitimize the squalor.

Preschool programming has a moral squalor all its own. Yes, there's a lot of kiddie agitprop about tolerance, niceness, and eating healthy—Cookie Monster's diet includes a lot of roughage now—and this is mostly harmless, or even helpful. What's not harmless is the defective moral compass that is embedded deep in the heart of every five-year-old: self-esteem. Ever since the days of *Captain Kangaroo*, kids have been taught that "the most important person in the whole wide world is you . . . and you hardly even know you." The result has been a confirmed explosion in unwarranted self-esteem among young people. I am all for teaching self-confidence and creativity, even bolstering self-esteem, but parents don't deserve to be parents if they think "go with your gut instincts" is a remotely helpful maxim for little kids to live by. When kids shove car keys into electrical sockets, they're going with their guts.

Hollywood, meanwhile, has been cranking out ideologically loaded kids' flicks for a long time now. Global-warming themes are standard fare in everything from *Ice Age* to *Happy Feet*. But even more traditional leftwingery is not hard to find. They should have given out promotional red diapers for *A Bug's Life* and *Antz*, two animated films lifted in big chunks from *Das Kapital*. Even *Time* film critic Richard Schickel warned, "Kids may be puzzled by rebellious worker ants chanting Marxist slogans, but their parental guides may welcome the relief from the prevailing blandness of family films."

The very best mass-market movies run against the propagandistic tide. In *The Incredibles* (a brilliantly anti-PC animated movie) the mother tells her son, Dash, that "everyone's special"—and Dash mutters in response, "Which is another way of saying no one is." Films like *Juno*, and even *Knocked Up* and *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, poke holes in the pieties that are spoon-fed to toddlers and fire-hosed at teens.

Why take this stuff seriously? Because people watch. Kids raised on Britney Spears epigrams such as "Can you handle my truth?" are probably going to find a lot of self-confirmation in the highly cultivated postmodern stupidity of America's campuses. The recent incident in which a Yale student claimed to have impregnated herself repeatedly and aborted the pregnancies is hardly surprising in a world where young people are taught that they are the measure of their own morality and that truth is a fashion statement. My NR colleague John Derbyshire may overstate things when he says that "popular culture is filth." But the truth—whether you can handle it or not—is that filth matters. **NR**

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Undetermined

There is danger in assuming that genes explain all

JIM MANZI

THE delineation of the double-helix structure of DNA by Watson and Crick in 1953 will almost surely rank as one of the most epochal scientific discoveries in human history. Following rapidly upon the synthesis of Darwinian evolution with Mendelian genetics in the 1930s and '40s, it enabled a research program that now seeks to explain a vast array of physical phenomena, from the functioning of individual organisms to the development of species over geological time. This success has led some science popularizers to believe that we have found a new Rosetta Stone enabling us to understand many of the mysteries of human existence. But if translated into public policy, their belief would likely have disastrous results. In the coming decades, it will be important for conservatives to walk a fine line: on one hand, to resist such hubris; on the other, not to throw the baby out with the bathwater by denying valid biological science.

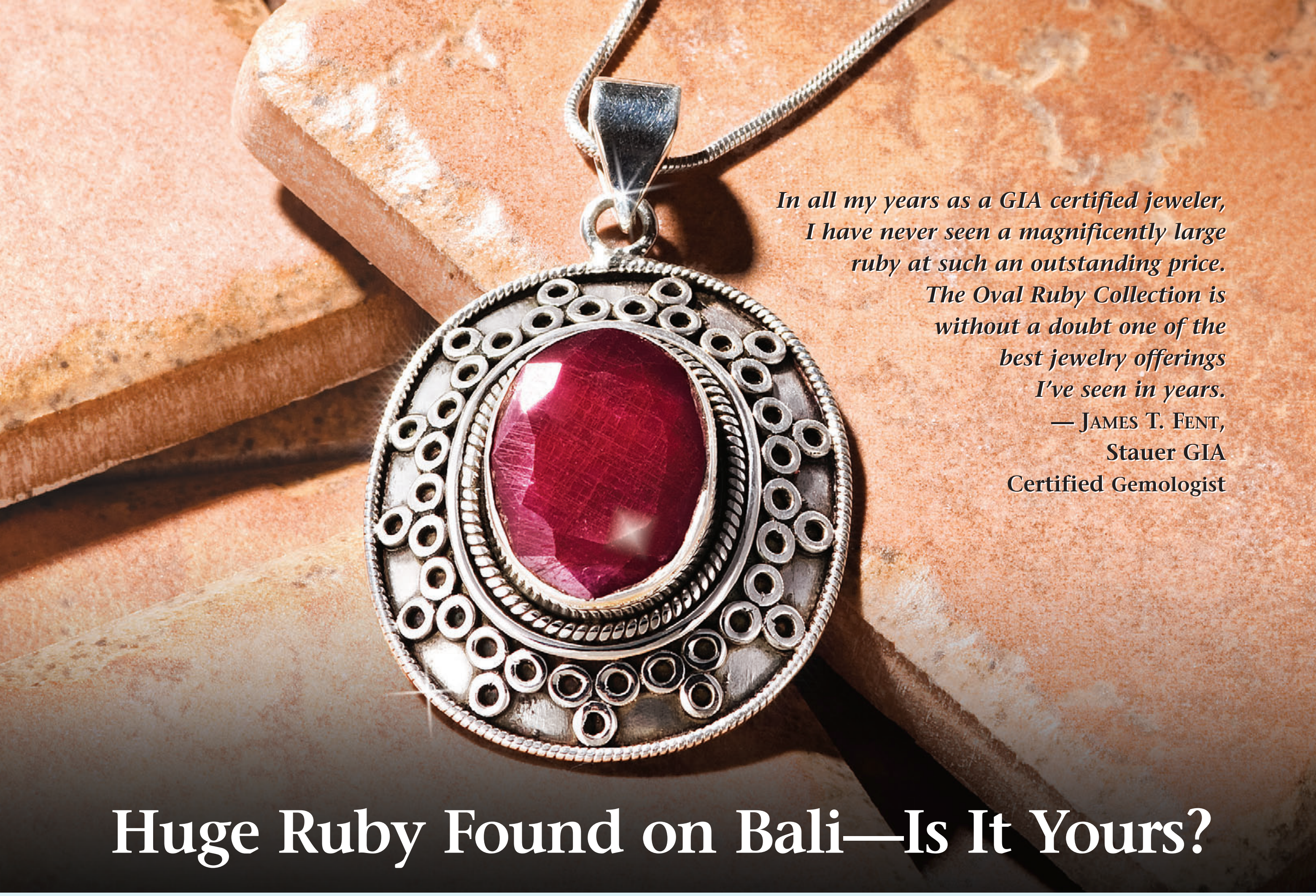
Driven by the genetic revolution, biology has displaced physics as the world's most important and exciting science. A substantial majority of all U.S. academic-research spending in science and engineering is now in life sciences. More than twice as many of the developed world's most widely cited scientific research papers are in the life sciences as are in physics and chemistry combined. Successful new scientific paradigms change how we see the world, and therefore exert intellectual influence well outside of the technical specialties that produced them. The more fundamental the paradigm, the wider and deeper are these radiating influences. In the case of modern biology, they are profound. Proceeding from the sociobiology movement of the 1970s, some biologists have sought to explain all individual behavior and social organization as the predictable result of genes-plus-environment. The reigning presumption of academic America is that over time this movement will sweep all before it.

This perspective inevitably trickles down into mainstream opinion. To choose just a few illustrative examples, within the past few months both *Time* and *The New York Times Magazine* have had cover stories on the evolutionary roots of morality; *Time* has had a second cover story on the biological basis of romance; *Newsweek* has had one article on the genetic explanation of psychological resilience and another arguing that varying incidences of disease-causing pathogens explain the degree to which different countries' policies are individualist or collectivist; NBC News has broadcast a story on the genetic basis for smoking addiction; ABC has had a story on the evolutionary origins of the incest taboo; and CBS has run a story titled "Eureka: Happiness Gene Found." Mass media are inundated with this biology-explains-all ideology.

OLD THOUGHTS, NEW ERRORS

Now, the idea that the vast majority of people share a set of stable, inherent characteristics—that is, the idea that there is such a thing as human nature—is not new. Nor are the subsidiary ideas that individuals have somewhat varying inborn natures; that this variation is partially heritable; and that individuals who share a lineage will demonstrate common traits and tendencies. All of these beliefs are at least several thousand years old, and probably predate written records.

What's new is that—because we believe that we have uncovered at least a component of the physical manifestation of human nature, in the form of the genome—many now believe that we can *operationalize* these old ideas: that we can explain the causes of the behaviors of individuals and groups sufficiently to



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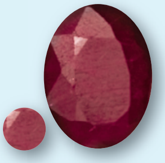

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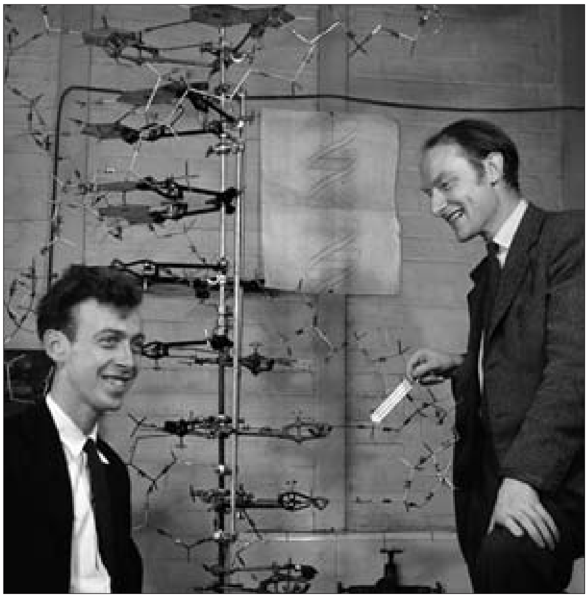
predict these behaviors scientifically. Those who believe this, believe that we can remove the mind-body problem from the purview of philosophy by reducing the mind to a scientifically explained physical phenomenon. When pushed, such theorists will generally admit that we cannot yet do much of this, but will then state confidently that we "are starting to understand" or "are on the verge of explaining" various human behaviors.

Media outlets will often speak loosely of things such as a "happiness gene," a "gay gene," or a "smart gene." The state-of-the-art method for finding such a link is something called a "genome-wide association study" (GWAS). In a GWAS, scientists use blood or saliva samples to sequence the DNA for a group of several thousand people who exhibit a trait or behavior of interest (the "case group"), and for a second group of several thousand who do not exhibit the trait or behavior (the "control group"). Scientists then look for genetic differences between the two groups. In cases where a single malfunctioning gene creates, for example, a catastrophic disease that overwhelms other genetic and environmental factors, a GWAS can quickly pinpoint the culprit. Sometimes, however, the behavior or trait is caused by several interacting genes—so that, for example, Gene 1 has some effect only if Gene 2 has a special structure. This is called "epistatic interaction," and can involve a large number of genes. Epistatic interactions make genetic effects harder to identify. Scientists deal with this problem and others by creating larger and larger case and control groups. The scaling up of such studies is among the most exciting frontiers in genetics. It is essentially an engineering problem, and money poured into solving it will likely improve human health through genetic screening and, ultimately, therapies.



Double-helix discoverers Watson and Crick

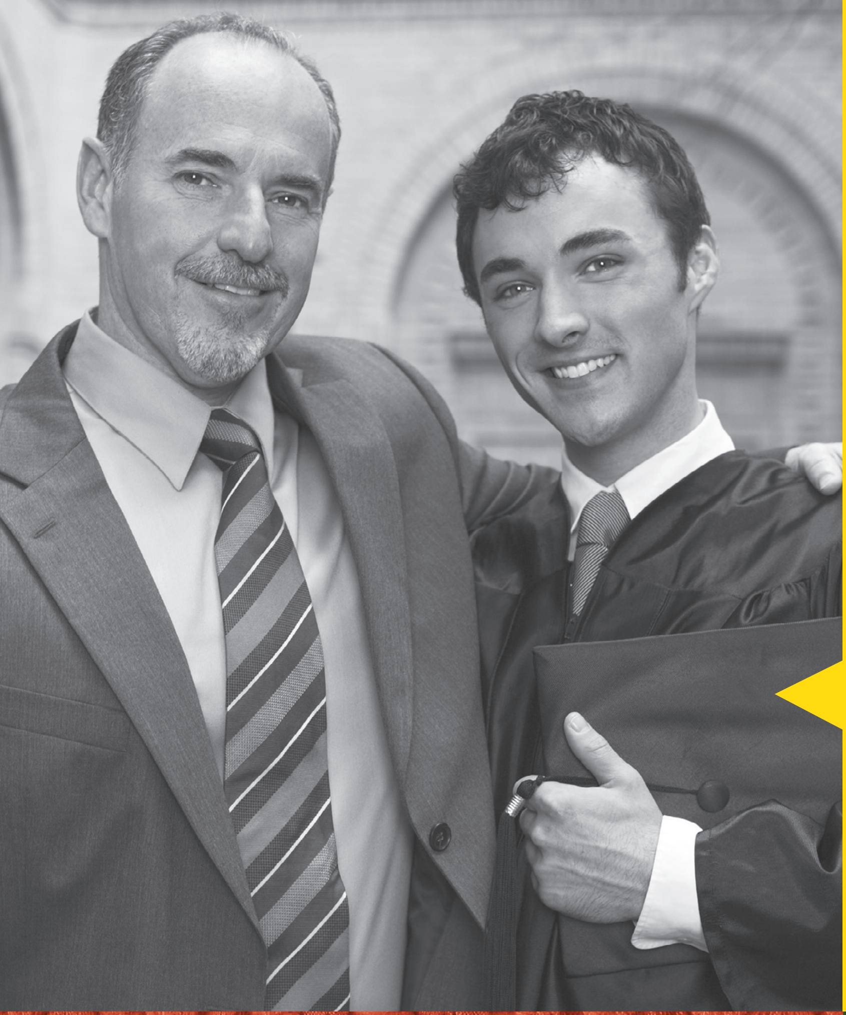
Seeing this momentum, it is natural to assume that eventually we will have explained *all* human behavior, not just diseases caused by one or a small number of interacting genes. But the GWAS technique hits structural limits when applied to conditions that involve epistatic interactions among lots of genes. Mental activity is now widely believed by scientists to depend on many genes (though mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder may turn out to be partial exceptions). A person has about 20,000 genes, of which more than 5,000 are believed to play some role in regulating brain function. Consider a simplified case in which some personality characteristic—aggressiveness, for example—is regulated by 100 genes, each of which can have two possible states ("on" or "off"). The combinatorial math is daunting: There are more than a trillion trillion possible combinations of these gene states. Thus we could sequence the DNA of all 6.7 billion human beings and still not know which genes are responsible for aggressiveness.

A second limitation of a GWAS is that it detects association rather than causation. Suppose we found that a case group of persons suffering from a disease had a greater incidence of some gene than did a control group, but that we failed to notice that the case group was disproportionately of Chinese ancestry. Culturally transmitted behaviors in the case group might be responsible for the disease, even if these behaviors had nothing to do with the gene in question. That is, the gene could be nothing more than a marker for Chinese ancestry, and hence for participation in behaviors that cause the disease. Geneticists call this problem "stratification," and deal with it by carefully matching individuals in the case and control groups to ensure that the groups really are comparable. The problem is that these stratification effects can be fiendishly subtle. No matter how carefully we match cases with controls, there can always be some unobserved environmental factor correlated with, but not caused by, a genetic difference between groups, and this environmental factor might be what is actually causing the disease.

Further, to think in terms of genes is to abstract away from a biochemical reality that is far more complex. On one hand, a gene is not an atomic entity, but a sophisticated machine with many components. Much as in the progress of particle physics over the past century, we keep discovering components-within-components of the genetic mechanism that are relevant to physical and mental outcomes, and it's entirely plausible that we will eventually get all the way down to subatomic quantum effects as drivers of behavior. On the other hand, as we move away from the genome itself, we see that other dimly understood biochemical processes have a large impact on how the information contained in the gene gets expressed as an observable human characteristic. And all of this is before we consider interactions of the human organism as a whole with those factors that we typically term "environmental," ranging from nutrition and exposure to pathogens to parenting styles and childhood experiences.

CORRELATION IS NOT CAUSALITY

So how is a GWAS showing an association between Gene X and aggressiveness different from a social-science study showing a correlation between watching lots of violent TV and aggressiveness? Mathematically, it's not. In both cases we start by measuring aggressiveness for each person. We then compile for each person a list of data providing information on potential causes of aggressiveness: in one case genomic information, and in the other, sociological observations on childhood experiences, school quality, and so on. In the first case we observe that aggressive people have a higher incidence of Gene X; in the second that they watch a lot of violent TV. The reliability of GWAS studies is thus subject to the same limitations that we think of in connection with



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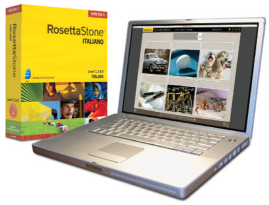

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sociology or economics (as opposed to, say, chemistry). The only way around this—the only way to attain the precision of chemistry—would be actually to show the chain of biochemical processes by which a set of named genes creates the observable brain functions collectively defined as “aggressiveness.” Of course, if we could do that, we would have no need for a GWAS study.

The claims of causality that arise from such studies should accordingly be treated with the appropriately intense skepticism that we apply to sociological or econometric studies. In the middle of the 20th century, Friedrich Hayek and the libertarians he inspired faced those who asserted that that an economy could be successfully planned. The libertarian position was not that such planning could be proved impossible in theory, but that we lacked sufficient information and processing power to accomplish it. The world of economic interaction is so complex that it overwhelms our ability to render it predictable; hence the need for markets to set prices. This is the same analytical problem we face when trying to predict a mental state that depends upon a large number of genes. It is unclear whether we will ever understand how this complicated machinery and its interactions with the environment come together to create characteristics of mind. It is certain, however, that we do not have such an understanding now, and that we won’t know such a project is achievable until we achieve it.

> If the pretense to scientific knowledge is always dangerous, it is doubly so when wedded to state power.

Consider a prominent example of the debate over genetic causality: the assertion that there is a genetic basis for IQ differences between racial groups. Because it is both so consequential and so fraught with emotion, this claim has been subject to an almost unique degree of critical scrutiny, descending into the kind of irresolvable debate that we see in economics and the social sciences.

Let’s start with some facts. There are sustained, statistically significant differences in IQ-test performance between self-identified racial groups in the U.S., and these self-identified racial groups also have statistically significant differences in genetic content. But those who assert that these genetic differences *cause* the difference in test scores have never been able to demonstrate a physical pathway from genes to IQ. In the absence of such a demonstration, they have had instead to rely on those old standbys, twin and adoption studies. (The logic here is that these studies can control for either genetics or the environment. Identical twins have identical DNA. By looking at cases of adoption, meanwhile, researchers can study children whose genetic background differs from that of the families in which they are raised.) The most famous and rigorous such study was the Minnesota Transracial Adoption Study of families in which high-IQ white parents adopted black, white, or mixed-race children. In theory, studying these subjects should have allowed us to isolate the influence of genes on intelligence, by measuring the IQs of children in each group after they had been raised in approximately equal environments. But it turned out that the environments were not even close to equal. The black children had been adopted at later ages than the white children, and this can plausibly be associated with differing scores on IQ tests.

The Minnesota study provides a good illustration of why it is so difficult to separate genetic from environmental effects: No such experiment in a non-totalitarian society is sufficiently controlled to support reasonable inferences. When we use these methods to try to understand the causes of IQ differences between groups, we are like cavemen trying to figure out how a computer works by poking at it with sharpened sticks. This, not political correctness, is why the American Psychological Association’s consensus on the matter of race and IQ is that, “at present, this question has no scientific answer.”

When we carefully consider assertions of a genetic basis for other mental or social phenomena, this pattern emerges time and again. The explanation sounds plausible—it *might* be true—but we can’t be sure. Is the almost-universal human religious impulse a byproduct of evolution? Perhaps. Can altruism be explained fully by genetic competition? Could be. Does homosexuality have a genetic cause? It’s possible.

SOUND THE WARNING

The fallacy of what might be called “geneticism” is particularly tempting to conservatives, because it appears to provide scientific support for the idea of an innate human nature—an idea that has long been assaulted from the left. But this temptation should be resisted. If the pretense to scientific knowledge is always dangerous, it is doubly so when wedded to state power, because it leads to pseudo-rational interventions that unduly extend authority and restrict freedom. That the linkage of race and IQ is provocative to contemporary audiences is not surprising: It is almost a direct restatement, in the language of genetics, of the key premise of Social Darwinism. That prior attempt to apply beliefs about human nature to public policy should be a cautionary tale for our era.

Just as Newtonian physics formed part of the backdrop for the thought of the Founders, Darwinian biology—from its beginnings, even before being synthesized with genetic theory—has found expression in both descriptions of physical evolution and conceptions of human society as similarly evolving. In the decades after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, evolution became the dominant scientific metaphor for understanding human society. Woodrow Wilson was clear about this when he said in *The New Freedom* (1913):

> Now, it came to me . . . that the Constitution of the United States had been made under the dominion of the Newtonian Theory . . .
>
> Politics in [the Founders’] thought was a variety of mechanics.

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> The Constitution was founded on the law of gravitation. The government was to exist and move by virtue of the efficacy of "checks and balances."
>
> The trouble with the theory is that government is not a machine, but a living thing. It falls, not under the theory of the universe, but under the theory of organic life. It is accountable to Darwin, not to Newton. It is modified by its environment, necessitated by its tasks, shaped to its functions by the sheer pressure of life. . . . There will be the family in a great building whose noble architecture will at last be disclosed, where men can live as a single community, co-operative as in a perfected, co-ordinated beehive.

Many thinkers at that time believed that Darwinian evolution represented not just a metaphor, but a physical explanation of the material superiority of European civilization. The application of evolutionary ideas supported the eugenics movement in the U.S. and Europe, in which policymakers gave natural selection a helping hand by encouraging differential breeding rates for "fit" and "unfit" persons.

This idea was the basis of Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.'s Supreme Court opinion upholding the right of the Commonwealth of Virginia to sterilize the feeble-minded, which ends with the immortal statement that "three generations of imbeciles are enough." Let's be clear about the results of this decision. A specific 18-year-old girl named Carrie Buck, who had been accused of no crime, was placed on a table, whereupon an agent of the state sliced open her abdomen and cut her Fallopian tubes against her will. She lived from that moment until her death with no chance of having children. All of this was done because Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. was pretty sure that her children would not have been smart enough. The ironic dénouement is that, just prior to this operation, Carrie Buck had actually had a daughter—whose subsequent performance in school was average at worst and often better.

This was not an aberrant case; over 60,000 Americans were forcibly sterilized in the 20th century. The Laughlin Model Law, which was the basis for most state statutes that regularized this practice, chillingly permitted the forcible sterilization of any "probable potential parent of socially inadequate offspring," and provided tactical inspiration for relevant statutes in Nazi Germany.

It was, in fact, the conflagration of the Holocaust that made human eugenics a more or less forbidden research topic for decades. But this halt has proved temporary. As the Holocaust passes from living memory, and biology makes enormous advances, the human inclination to intellectual vanity is reasserting itself. This seems almost inevitable. The sense of seeing beneath the surface of things, provided by the greatest scientific insights, is intoxicating. Genetic maximalists are just a modern version of the Pythagorean cultists or the Newton-inspired Enlightenment *philosophes*.

Despite their confidence in predicting future discoveries, however, our ignorance about humanity runs deep, and the complexities of mind and society continue to escape reduction to scientific explanation. This ignorance is one of the most powerful arguments for free-market economics, subsidiarity, and many of the other elements of the conservative worldview. Science may someday allow us to predict human behavior comprehensively and reliably, so that we can live in Woodrow Wilson's "perfected, co-ordinated beehive." Until then, however, we need to keep stumbling forward in freedom as best we can. **NR**

2008 III

Beneath The Hope

Obama and the politics of grievance

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON

THE more Barack Obama racks up majorities in states with large university and black populations—what Clinton strategist Paul Begala called the "eggheads and African-Americans"—the more he seems to fare poorly in the electoral-vote-rich states that will be in play in November, most of which have large white working-class constituencies. Indeed, he may be the first Democratic nominee in memory to lose the primary elections in California, Indiana, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

Barack Obama talks passionately about hope, change—and racial transcendence. But what advanced him this far was not merely his eloquence, but also his ability simultaneously to play on, and disguise, the politics of racial grievance. And yet he seems confused and angry when reminded that such a doctrine won't quite deliver him the presidency. When the anti-American remarks of Rev. Jeremiah Wright were widely aired, Obama seemed at first taken aback. Why would anyone be outraged? After all, there was nothing secret about Wright. Obama had even quoted, in his memoir, Wright's accusations that white America was responsible for everything from world hunger to genocide against the Japanese, and had bragged in speeches about his intimacy with Wright.

So Obama was naturally confused by the outcry. At first he thought he could shrug his way out of it with the quip that the Trinity congregation was not "particularly controversial"; Wright himself, in Obama's words, was "brilliant" and a "respected Biblical scholar." Yet within days Obama resorted to a different defense: Wright was not much more out of the mainstream than the proverbial outspoken and often embarrassing "old uncle." After that, Obama ended up offering several additional explanations, among them an inspirational speech on race—which unexpectedly turned out to be a sort of get-out-of-jail-free card for Wright, who later at the National Press Club confirmed that his earlier inane rants about whites, the AIDS virus, and American culpability for 9/11 in fact were not taken out of context but deeply embedded in his worldview.

For all Obama's eloquence, his clean-up campaign contextu-

Mr. Hanson is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, and a recipient of the 2007 National Humanities Medal and the 2008 Bradley Prize.

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alized the serial Wright venom within the familiar saga of grievance and racial victimization: Whites do not understand the theatrical protocols of Wright's black church. The prior good works of Wright in community outreach and anti-apartheid activism outweigh his occasional unfortunate speech. Wright's slurs were taken out of context. Wright had been turned into a convenient tool for right-wing politicos. In short, Obama was reduced to pleading on March 18, "I can no more disown him [Wright] than I can my white grandmother—a woman who helped raise me."

But, of course, that blanket amnesty for Wright became inoperative after the enterprising Wright's National Press Club rant of April 28, whose insulting tone elicited outrage among the liberal Washington press corps, and thus required yet another Obama protestation: "It is antithetical to our campaign. It is antithetical to what I'm about. It is not what I think America stands for. Reverend Wright does not speak for me. He does not speak for our campaign. I cannot prevent him from making these outrageous remarks. . . . When I say that I find these statements appalling, I mean it . . . makes me angry but also saddens me."

> To his credit, Wright has been consistent in his views, odious though they may be. It is Obama who on five or six occasions has changed his story about Wright.

Wright, of course, said nothing on April 28 that he had not said previously. To his credit, Wright has been consistent in his views, odious though they may be. It is Obama who on five or six occasions has changed his story about Wright—always under pressure, and always in reaction to the public's, rather than his own, outrage at Wright.

IT'S NOT JUST WRIGHT

Meanwhile, Michelle Obama, the candidate's wife, was reported airing her own grievances about a "just downright mean" America. Her serial complaints culminated in the now infamous "For the first time in my adult life, I am proud of my country." That revelation, voiced on two separate occasions, raised a storm of protest, since it seemed to confirm that Wright's anti-American message had been absorbed into the Obama worldview after the couple's 20 years of attendance at his church.

The most controversial of the growing list of Obama grievances and clumsy retractions was Barack's dismissal of Pennsylvania's small-town, middle-America culture: "And it's not surprising then they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations."

Like Reverend Wright's mendacious views on 9/11 and AIDS, almost everything in that sentence was either untrue or disingenuous. Pennsylvanians valued gun ownership and religion for centuries before the supposed current economic downturn—and while times are perceived as rough, the unemployment rate in Pennsylvania is still about 5 percent. Obama himself has whipped up "anti-trade sentiment" by trashing NAFTA and similar proposed trade accords.

That he gave this speech in liberal, upscale San Francisco only added to the aura of condescension—especially the standard liberal trope of false consciousness: The ignorant working classes turn toward extraneous palliatives rather than follow the advice of Harvard intellectuals to agitate for economic redistribution that would better solve their mostly material problems. Had Hillary Clinton used the same sort of "they" language—say in front of a conservative, midwestern white audience—to explain why inner-city, gun-toting, church-attending blacks were turning out en masse for Obama, her campaign would have been rightly finished then and there.

Michelle resonated these same themes of liberal superciliousness when she announced that "Barack is one of the smartest people you will ever encounter who will deign to enter this messy thing called politics." She even expanded on Barack's dismissal of Pennsylvanians, by suggesting that all of America suffers from the same blinkered parochialism: "Barack will never allow you to go back to your lives as usual, uninvolved, uninformed."

More disturbing than the original grievance was Obama's rationalization for his Pennsylvania comment. He didn't apologize for the sentiments expressed, but instead lamely pleaded that he might have "mangled" or "conflated" what he intended to say. Later Obama suggested that his message about Middle America's misery and bitterness was true. But when Obama's formal clarification of Pennsylvania's problems followed, it once again only emphasized his accustomed slipperiness: "So people they vote about guns, or they take comfort from their faith and their family and their community. And they get mad about illegal immigrants who are coming over to this country or they get frustrated about, you know, how things are changing. That's a natural response."

Note how the original "cling" now becomes "vote about" and "take comfort from." Likewise, "antipathy to people who aren't like them" morphs into "their family and their community"—as fundamentalist xenophobes are really just beleaguered folks who band together. Obama lectured the San Francisco–area wealthy about the "anti-immigrant" scapegoating habits of Middle Americans. But he really meant, or so he later said, that they are merely "mad about illegal immigrants." Note again, in the clarification, how Obama's nativists, who oppose all immigrants, legal and illegal, transform into reasonable people becoming understandably angry only about those coming here illegally.

Yet when all that still didn't work, Obama simply said he was a churchgoer himself, so how could he ridicule devout Pennsylvanians?—omitting altogether that he had slurred them as clinging to "antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment."

SILVER SPOONS

Why do the affluent, astute Obamas cling to such doctrinaire grievances, and then offer insulting clarifications when called on them? The obvious explanation is that Barack Obama had previously navigated only on the small lakes of the Ivy League and Chicago politics, where the drumbeat of grievance pays real dividends and easy anti-American throw-off lines are hardly gaffes. But now, for the first time in his life, he is buffeted by the gales of an ever-widening national campaign where his once-persuasive themes suddenly sound absurd.

The problem with Obama's former habitat—and the Democratic-primary landscape—is not just that activist blacks, students, and Ivy Leaguers are not a good cross-section of the American population. Rather, such sympathetic audiences ensured that every whine that he and his wife have voiced over 20 years has been applauded rather than examined—and so they became deeply ingrained in the Obama psyche. When pressed on Wright's Press Club slurs, Michelle Obama announced: "You know what I think. . . . We've got to move forward. You know, this conversation doesn't help my kids." With Michelle, it is never about reassuring "uninvolved, uniformed" Americans that she condemns Wright, the abject racist—but always about her own family's travails.

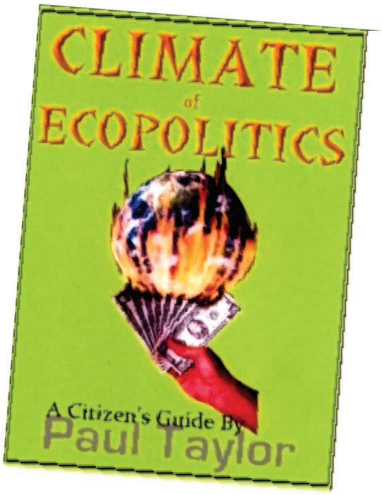
An upscale Chicago neighborhood hardly thinks that past familiarity with self-described bomber Bill Ayers is a liability. If an Obama associate like Rev. James Meeks blasts homosexuals, or Los Angeles Obama supporter Rev. Eric Lee spouts anti-Semitic drivel, they do so under the accepted cover that black victims cannot themselves be victimizers. And Reverend Wright's tirades no more offended 8,000 in the present congregation of Trinity Church than they apparently did the Obamas, who, far from walking out, simply refined Wright in softer and more elegant terms in their own writings and speeches. Those at Columbia or Harvard readily buy into the *What's the Matter with Kansas?* pop neo-Marxism—namely, that the Democratic party's inability to garner a majority of the electorate is caused entirely by the fact that Karl Rove's Republicans confuse and manipulate ignorant yokels, who, in their desperation and fear, stupidly retreat to guns, God, and racism.

So in his defense, Obama was only voicing what is now the elitist doctrine of many Democrats. *Newsweek* essayist Michael Hirsh recently scoffed that the problem with the white working class that mysteriously cannot appreciate Obama goes back to the pathological nature of American history that plagues us still: "The outcome was that a substantial portion of the new nation developed, over many generations, a rather savage, unsophisticated set of mores. Traditionally, it has been balanced by a more diplomatic, communitarian Yankee sensibility from the Northeast and upper Midwest. But that latter sensibility has been losing ground in population numbers—and cultural weight."

Given his worldview, it's entirely predictable that Obama will continue, if inadvertently, to voice grievances that offend those in Middle America. He can win the Democratic nomination the same way McGovern, Mondale, Dukakis, and Kerry did—by appealing to an activist-liberal base. And he will never really offer unequivocal apologies for what he declares or what his associates say, because he doesn't feel he's done anything wrong—at least by the standards of his past that are continually buttressed by his campaign staff and much of the mainstream media. Better for all of them to blame Pennsylvania, the white working class, or the illiberal southern and frontier strains within American history for the fact that Obama's genius is insufficiently appreciated.

Obama thinks mea culpas are not necessary, because his eloquence will always remedy what offends. That's why someone who was named by *National Journal* as the Senate's most doctrinaire liberal can, with a straight face, persuade millions that he is running on a record of bipartisanship. Obama may advocate engaging Iran's President Ahmadinejad, who has advocated the annihilation of Israel; but he can also condemn Jimmy Carter's recent embrace of Hamas leaders with, "We must not negotiate with a terrorist group intent on Israel's destruction."

Obama frequently resorts to false analogy. For him, as we have seen, context is everything—and it is often established by false comparison. So, for example, Reverend Wright is not *that* venomous, but a sort of everyman's eccentric uncle—as if we



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could choose blood relatives as we do pastors. Wright's racism is shared by all, and not meant to be pernicious, in the manner that his grandmother's fear of young black males on the street is that of a "typical white person"—as if one were right to embarrass a once-nurturing but now-aged grandmother to absolve a political crony; as if there were not statistics suggesting that black male youths are more prone to commit violent crimes than their white and Asian counterparts.

According to Obama, unrepentant bomber Bill Ayers is analogous to Tom Coburn, a Republican senator from Oklahoma and a physician, who once suggested that laws might be drafted allowing capital punishment for the abortionist—as if the terrorist were morally equivalent to the physician-senator. This is 1960s relativism and "they do it too" at its very worst.

It's not just inexperience or the climate of the Democratic party, but also the current state of race relations that ensures the Obamas will continue to say things they should not—and then make it worse by rationalizing what they say. For all the incessant calls for a "national conversation about race," racial grievance is about all we have been talking about the past few years. But it has been an unfortunate one-way sermon, in which well-off black activists lament the legacy of slavery, present-day racism, and the need for various forms of reparations, while their white interlocutors accept that there is to be no reference to miseries within the black community that are not explicable by mere prejudice—such as inordinate rates of drug use, illegitimacy, and crime.

True "conversations" cannot proceed, because all sorts of taboo topics cannot be raised—from the success of Asians and other minorities to the previous successful integration of millions of blacks into the mainstream of American life. We saw that one-sided dialogue on the airwaves, with too many black intellectuals defending Wright by redefining Martin Luther King down as a similar principled firebrand, by arguing that there was often truth to Wright's slanders, and by associating him with widely shared and legitimate black angst—until Wright embarrassed them all by deliberately going after Obama and insulting a sympathetic white-liberal D.C. press corps.

A Reverend Wright cannot move into a multimillion-dollar estate of over 10,000 square feet by downplaying racial differences, much less by preaching racial reconciliation and self-help. He lacks the talent and character of a Clarence Thomas, Condoleezza Rice, or Colin Powell—indeed, he lacks the ability of the millions in the black middle class that he serially damns. Instead Wright profits by lambasting black "middle-classness," the U.S., and white people. This offers a sort of Sunday venting for some blacks who in effect hire him to "contextualize" and transfer their personal failures and complaints onto some higher plane of cosmic racism—which may well bring them government or social compensation, both material and psychological.

The culmination of Wright's audacity, and his complete confidence in the exemption that his apparent black authenticity provides, was his infamous April 27 keynote address to the Detroit NAACP's 53rd Annual Fight for Freedom Fund dinner, in which he delineated racial differences between blacks and "Europeans" in their respective manners of learning. Wright outlined a "right brain" black emphasis on spirituality and musicality versus a white "left brain" aptitude for analysis and logic; it was just the sort of Bell Curve racialism that at one time earned blanket condemnation. But it won Wright a standing ovation from an audience of the nation's premier civil-rights organization (and brought not a word of condemnation from Obama himself).

Obama had to sit through years of Wright's lunacy *precisely* to prove to his future local constituents that he would air their grievances, and to establish his own bona fides as a voice of the ghetto oppressed.

SOURCES OF OBAMA CONDUCT

Obama learned from, but radically refined, this racial approach. A Barry Obama who never attended Trinity Church—one who would write not a memoir called *Dreams from My Father*, but a more accurate one called *Dreams from My Grandparents*, in praise of those who raised him—would be evaluated entirely on his own merits. He would find it difficult to transmogrify into a racial sensation who appeals to, and is used by, a host of others. In political terms, that might have made him a charismatic and eloquent black congressman of mixed heritage, one who ignores race—like the talented and successful former congressman Harold Ford Jr. If Obama had been a white media sensation, a newcomer without congressional accomplishment, he might have matched the third-place finish of suave John Edwards. Without either racial packaging or legislative accomplishment, a talented first-term senator surely would not become a president—as liberals from Black Entertainment Television billionaire Robert Johnson to veteran politico Geraldine Ferraro have pointed out.

Instead, *Harvard Law Review* editor Barack Obama had to sit through years of Wright's lunacy *precisely* to prove to his future local constituents that he would air their grievances, and to establish his own bona fides as a voice of the ghetto oppressed. Once these street credentials were painfully acquired, the Ivy League–educated Obama would—like Wright—win a guilt-free context for an elite lifestyle, and a political base from which to transcend, soaring with a message of social and racial misery. It is a winning combination: Unlike black conservatives, Obama taps into the identity politics of victimization and grievance; unlike white liberals, he resonates racial authenticity; and, unlike race hustlers such as Al Sharpton or Reverend Wright, he

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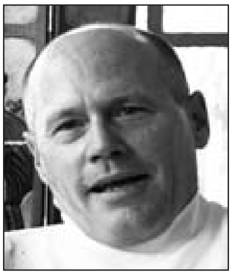
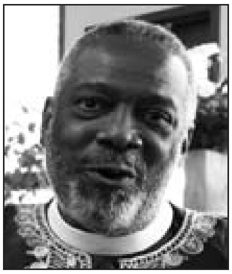


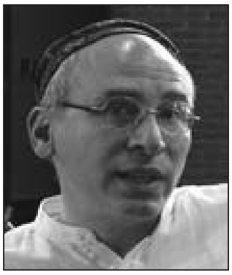
"One of the reasons that we as religious leaders need to speak out against it is because we share responsibility for it."
– **REV. SCOTT RICHARDSON**, Dean, St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral, San Diego



"There has to be a complete reconsideration of what law enforcement represents in our community... I'm convinced that it would be a totally different world if that adversarial relationship did not exist between law enforcement and the young people of this country."
– **REV. EDWIN SANDERS**, Senior Pastor, Metropolitan Interdenominational, Nashville

"With the mandatory sentences you don't need a judge or a jury. All you need is a clerk to come in and weigh the drugs... [T]he whole drug policy and those laws need to be repealed."
– **SISTER MARION DEFEIS**, Catholic prison chaplain (ret.)

"We know we have a drug problem [but] war is definitely not the answer... The reality is... this drug war has put more armaments on our streets."
– **EDDIE LOPEZ**, Former United Methodist Pastor, New York



"I would say that the war on drugs has caused as much devastation to communities around this country, particularly low income communities, as the drugs themselves."
– **RABBI MICHAEL FEINBERG**, Exec. Dir., Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition

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is consistently eloquent rather than at times crude and off-putting.

The Obamas may have made over $4 million in 2007, but Michelle can still credibly preach on the stump that a nebulous "they" raised the bar on them—as Ivy League loans, private school, camp for the kids, and costly piano lessons do their part to take them down. The "man" of the 'hood—the "man" who smothers black aspirations—is ubiquitous. Indeed, Michelle can testify that he becomes "they" who hound blacks even in the white suburbs after they have become millionaires: "Folks set the bar, and then you work hard and you reach the bar—sometimes you surpass the bar—and then *they* move the bar!"

To the Obamas, the multifarious "they" are also sometimes the illiberal white working classes, who did not accept hope and change and lost Obama Pennsylvania and now Indiana. For Michelle, another "they" changed the rules of campaigning and made the Obamas raise ever more cash and become ever more organized: "*They* tell you to raise money, you raise money. *They* tell you to build an organization, and you build an organization."

If, to acquire lucre and power, a Jeremiah Wright realized that he had to allow angrier blacks from time to time to vent their unhappiness by articulating the role of sinister cosmic forces—such as government-induced HIV viruses and magic bombs that target only blacks and Arabs—a Barack Obama sensed that he could trump that, by franchising his politics of grievance to a new neighborhood of affluent white intellectuals and professionals. Obama gave his Pennsylvania "they cling" speech to a nodding Bay Area audience. While white elites lack the economic resentments of Reverend Wright's flock, they have psychological needs that a mellifluous Obama brilliantly discovered how to address.

Their zealotry for Obama singularly reassures white liberal elites that they really are empathetic to minority needs, but need not feel that their own riches came at the expense of others. Through her *Huffington Post*, Arianna Huffington can voice the Obama concern for the oppressed while cruising the shores of Tahiti in David Geffen's 452-foot yacht. So there is no reason to join a Trinity outreach program to tutor the ghetto youngster, or dismantle the wall around the gated compound, when you can put an Obama sign on your Brentwood lawn. Abroad, the dividends are even greater. A President Barack Hussein Obama, who emblemizes grievance and contrition, can refashion America's global image. The affluent liberal American wants to be liked every bit as much as he wants to enjoy his hybrid Mercedes, his granite countertops, and having a daughter at Princeton.

This is the maze that Obama worked through in brilliant fashion—in Chicago, in Illinois statewide, and in the primaries. But now, as the general election looms, he is in a much larger, more unfamiliar labyrinth, and he hasn't quite figured it out yet—

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even though a war, a troubled economy, and an unpopular Republican president have given him openings not available to other Democrats since the post-Watergate election of 1976.

Most Americans are tired of racial victimization and opportunism, especially as the country becomes more multiracial, with a myriad of competing grievances. They haven't elected a northern liberal president since JFK, nearly half a century ago. They don't like hypocritical elites preaching to them about their supposedly reactionary habits. And yet some of their votes are still essential, if one wishes to win the presidency.

So the question remains how quickly an adept, adaptable, and seemingly unprincipled Barack Obama will come to understand that he can no longer say—or contextualize—what was so successful in bringing him this far. Instead, in Bill Clinton fashion, from time to time he will have to bite his lip, look humbled—and then simply apologize for the silly grievances he voices and the even sillier people that for so long he has befriended. If he cannot do that, then the next six months will be characterized by more smug, off-the-cuff dismissals of middling America, more innate condescension from Michelle Obama, still more racism from the malicious Reverend Wright, more skeletons yet to appear out of Barack Obama's vast progressive cemetery of the last 20 years—and, by October, the greatest case of Democratic buyer's remorse since the McGovern campaign of midsummer 1972. **NR**

■ CHINA

The Road to Beijing

The perils and possibilities of holding the Olympic Games in a police state

JAY NORDLINGER

THE Beijing Olympics are approaching: They will begin on August 8. They were scheduled to begin earlier, on July 25—but the government's meteorologists counseled that the start be delayed, increasing the chances of fair weather. Everything must be perfect for the Beijing Olympics: They are China's "coming-out party," as everyone says.

Mr. Nordlinger is an NR senior editor. *Here, There & Everywhere: Collected Writings of Jay Nordlinger* can be found at Store.NationalReview.com.

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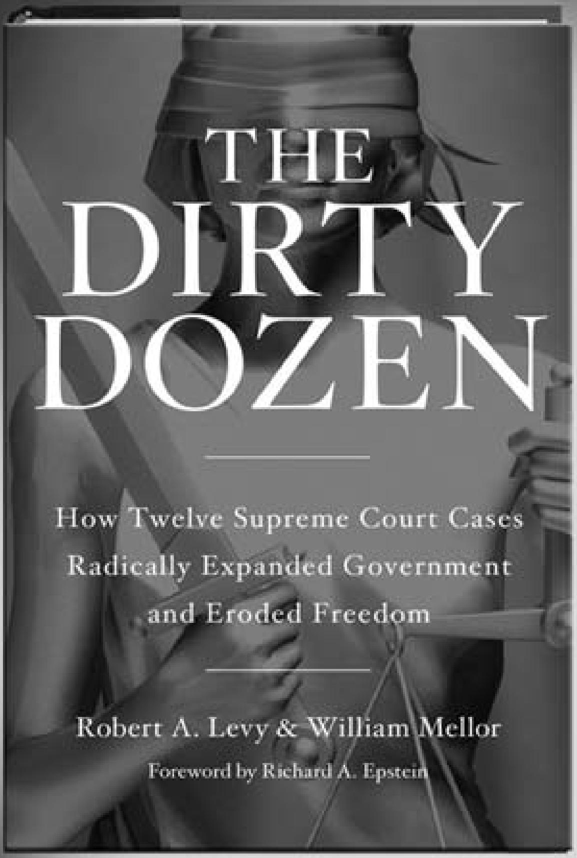

THE DIRTY DOZEN
How Twelve Supreme Court Cases Radically Expanded Government and Eroded Freedom
Robert A. Levy & William Mellor
Foreword by Richard A. Epstein

The Olympics are, indeed, a pivotal moment for China, and its Communist government (if the two can be separated). Other countries are facing an important moment too, where their China policies are concerned. These Olympics have raised the question, What is China? and a correlative question: How is the world to regard and treat it?

Beijing tried very, very hard to secure the 2000 Olympics, losing out to Sydney by a hair. They poured billions of dollars into “Olympic construction.” They launched a campaign for public hygiene, using the slogan “Mobilize the Masses for a Fly-Free City!” They offered members of the International Olympic Committee an array of inducements. As a Beijing official put it, “We look upon the International Olympic Committee as God. Their wish is our command.”

An opinion from France

They even relaxed their chokehold on people in their domain. They stopped monitoring foreign journalists so closely. And they released a political prisoner or two. In other words, they allowed for an “Olympic Pause”—the name given to the Nazis’ temporary loosening in the 1930s, when the Games were held in Berlin.

China lost out for 2000, but they put in another bid for the 2008 Games, and won. Their argument was that this was their due; that they could no longer be denied. As one official lectured, “The Olympic Games belong to the whole world. The fact that the Games have not yet been held in China is a failure of the Olympic movement.” Pressed on the issue of human rights, he huffed, “There is *no* excuse for denying the dreams of 1.3 billion people to hold the Olympics in Beijing.”

Understandably, the Chinese Communists hate any comparison of their Games to the Berlin Games. But such comparisons are inevitable, for anyone taking an honest look. When the Olympics are held in police states, similarities occur.

As a rule, Americans are taught that the ’36 Games were a failure for the Nazis, given the fabulous performance by Jesse Owens: The black American trackster won four gold medals. And that was supposed to have refuted Nazi race theories. Unfortunately, the Games were a huge success for the Nazis—enhancing their legitimacy, cementing their power. And Leni Riefenstahl made that stirring film, *Olympia*.

In his book *Hitler’s Games*, Duff Hart-Davis relates that Berlin was turned out nicely and benignly. This created the illusion that Nazi Germany was “a perfectly normal place, in which life went on as pleasantly as in any other European country.” Of course, Beijing has been engaged in the same Potemkinization—as was perfectly predictable.

When Beijing was competing for the 2008 Games, Chinese human-rights types—dissidents and their supporters—were split. Most were against the granting of the Games to Beijing; but some were for, arguing that the Games would force China to open up, just a little. There was much talk of the “spotlight”: The spotlight would be on China, and would it help or hurt? Those opposed to the Beijing Games said that the spotlight had been on China before—for other sporting events and international conferences—and that this had caused the government to tighten its grip all the more. The government’s reasoning (in this view)? *Foreigners are coming, and we have to look sharp, so no trouble-making is allowed. All undesirable elements must be swept away. We have to show a happy, wholesome, united front.*

ULRIKE KOLTERMANN

One Chinese-American journalist said at the time, “The Communists create an atmosphere, a mood, in which they can do anything.”

Back when Beijing was lobbying for the ’08 Games, they made all sorts of promises. One official said the Games “are an opportunity to foster democracy, improve human rights, and integrate China with the rest of the world.” That was the line, taken by all supporters of Beijing 2008. This same official said, “By allowing Beijing to host the Games, you will help the development of human rights.”

And how is China faring? The Communists are cracking heads *precisely because of the Olympics*—which is a point that the most unflinching observers keep making. Even the minor courtesy of an Olympic Pause has not been implemented. The question is whether Beijing will somehow be held to account.

DARFUR AND TIBET

For years, there was very little protest in the West over the coming of the Beijing Games—just some isolated cries, here and there. But one issue sort of aroused the world at large: Darfur. Beijing was the major backer of Khartoum, and Khartoum was responsible for genocide. The actress Mia Farrow attacked what she called the “Genocide Games” (meaning, Beijing ’08). She put particular pressure on Steven Spielberg, the universally beloved director, who was advising Beijing on the theatrical elements of the Olympics. “Does Mr. Spielberg really want to go down in history as the Leni Riefenstahl of the Beijing Games?” Farrow asked.

Spielberg, citing Sudan, withdrew from the Olympics. The theater is now mainly in the hands of another famous director, Zhang Yimou—and he may well show Riefenstahl-like skills.

In March of this year, another issue aroused the world at large: Tibet. China cracked down there, as it periodically does. And, like Darfur, Tibet is a popular cause, attracting celebrities. Many who otherwise have little interest in atrocities committed by Communists take an interest in Tibet—it probably goes with an interest in Tibetan Buddhism.

So, virtually all the protest against China has centered around Tibet and Sudan. It has not centered around the brutalities that Beijing inflicts on the Chinese people every day: arbitrary arrest, torture, murder, the repression of religion, the laogai (gulag), the denial of human and civil rights, the organ harvesting, etc. It was two relatively peripheral issues, Tibet and Sudan, that got the world cross with Beijing. But at least the regime's behavior has not been ignored altogether.

They were the victim of bad timing, were the Chinese Communists. Their head-cracking in Tibet began just two weeks before the start of the Olympic Torch Relay—which they had dubbed the "Journey of Harmony." Tibet was still holding the world's attention.

The torch was lit in Olympia, of course, where Liu Qi, president of the Beijing Organizing Committee, addressed a crowd. He was interrupted by protesters—Chinese officials are not used to being interrupted by protesters, ever. Three members of Reporters Without Borders, an invaluable group, unfurled a banner showing the traditional Olympic rings as handcuffs. There were other demonstrations as well.

Incidentally, Tibetans in Europe organized a counter-relay, called the Tibetan Freedom Torch Relay. When they had their torch-lighting in Olympia, officials from the Chinese embassy in Athens were present, filming the participants. That is standard practice for Beijing, carried out on foreign soil with no interference, and with barely a murmur.

As China's torch—the Olympic torch—made its way to various major capitals, pro-Tibet demonstrators got themselves noticed. In London, Paris, and elsewhere, they committed what China's official press called "vile misdeeds": They tried to douse the torch, for example. Everywhere, the relay was unsmooth. As one torchbearer said, "Nothing is happening as it was meant to." Especially galling to Western audiences was the special Chinese security squadron, running along with the torch. They behaved like goons and thugs. Their official name was the "Sacred Flame Protection Unit." They presented themselves to the world as Chinese brownshirts.

In London, a Chinese official said, "This is not the right time, the right platform, for any people to voice their political views." That took real effrontery to say: In his country, the "People's Republic of China," it is never the right time for people to voice their political views—unless those views perfectly conform to the official line.

Back in the PRC, people did not see interruptions of the torch relay—because, whenever there was such an interruption, Chinese television went blank. When interruptions were reported, they were explained as the work of a few "hooligans," "separatists," and "splittists"—people who hate China and are trying to blacken its name. The government takes many opportunities to inflame Chinese nationalism, one of the strongest and ugliest forces on earth.

MEASURES BENIGN AND CRUEL

Beijing has done everything it can in preparation for the Olympic Games—again, everything must be perfect. There must be nothing untoward. Some of the government's measures are benign; some of them less so. Among the benign measures: a new airport terminal, huge and impressive. When it opened, the band played "Auld Lang Syne."

A million cars have been banned from Beijing, and 200 million trees planted. This is an effort to combat the city's pollution, which is severe. They have prohibited tobacco for the Olympic period: You can't smoke on public transport or in indoor workplaces—a real sacrifice for a heavily smoking nation. There will be anti-spitting patrols. Citizens have been admonished to be polite to foreigners. And government workers have been warned to watch their morals: These men are not to have their energies "dissipated by wine and women."

The name of the Propaganda Department has been changed to "Publicity Department"—for the benefit of English speakers (only). Chinese scientists have been tinkering with the weather, as they are wont to do. They practice "rain mitigation," and they are doing their best to ensure that no rain, or less rain, falls on the Olympics. And, in order to make way for improvements, and to make Beijing sightlier, the government has razed whole neighborhoods, once filled with traditional huts. There is not much thought to the people displaced.

Westerners marvel at what the Chinese authorities can accomplish, and the speed with which they can accomplish it. They are even envious. An American acting as a senior adviser to the Beijing Olympic Committee said, "The ability to get things done here is really staggering. In Los Angeles, it would take endless discussions to build any structure. Here they decide to do it, and kaboom! It happens." Yes, dictatorships are known to be good at that sort of thing.

In anticipation of the Games, this dictatorship has given the cop on the beat a little instruction in English. They have published a manual called "Olympic Security English," for home study. The *Christian Science Monitor* obtained a copy. A practice dialogue headed "How to Stop Illegal News Coverage" goes like this:

> P(oliceman): Excuse me, sir. Stop, please.
> F(oreign journalist): Why?
> P: Are you gathering news here?
> F: Yes.
> P: About what?
> F: About Falun Gong [an outlawed, viciously persecuted quasi-religious group].
> P: Show me your press card and your reporter's permit.
> F: Here you are.
> P: What news are you permitted to cover?
> F: The Olympic Games.
> P: Falun Gong has nothing to do with the Games. . . . You should only cover the Games.
> F: But I'm interested in Falun Gong.
> P: It's beyond the limit of your coverage and illegal. As a foreign reporter in China you should obey China law and do nothing against your status.
> F: Oh, I see. May I go now?
> P: No. Come with us.
> F: What for?
> P: To clear up this matter.

"Come with us," indeed.

The authorities have done their considerable best to sweep away "unharmonious" elements, including beggars, migrant workers, and so on. China must show a happy, carefree face. The authorities have also rounded up hundreds of stray cats, and some pictures of this roundup have appeared: dismaying.

According to a report in *Time* magazine, "thousands of websites have been shuttered while government controls and blocking of sites outside China [have] intensified significantly in recent months." Irene Khan, head of Amnesty International, is quoted as saying that China's ongoing "crackdown" has "deepened, not lessened, because of the Olympics." As for press controls, they are numerous and strict. Nothing must be disseminated that, in the government's words, "endangers China's national security, reputation, and interests."

They have been rounding up Falun Gong with renewed energy, arresting almost 2,000 of them, according to the group. In addition, they have been rounding up Uighurs—the disaffected Turkic minority—lest they get Tibet-like ideas (or rather, act on them).

And they have arrested heroic dissidents—China's best people—such as Hu Jia. He was arrested and sentenced (to three and a half years) precisely because he had criticized the ruling party's Olympic maneuvers. As the party press put it, "Hu spread malicious rumors and committed libel in an attempt to subvert the state's political power and socialist system."

In an article he wrote with Teng Biao, a lawyer, Hu had a message for visitors to the Beijing Olympics: "You will see skyscrapers, spacious streets, modern stadiums and enthusiastic people. You will see the truth, but not the whole truth, just as you see only the tip of an iceberg. You may not know that the flowers, smiles, harmony and prosperity are built on a base of grievances, tears, imprisonment, torture and blood."

Other Chinese who have been arrested, or who have been "disappeared," because of their writings about the Olympics include Yang Chunlin, Gao Zhisheng, and Wang Dejia. Each one of them makes an amazing, appalling, and inspiring story. Why do some people risk so much against a vastly powerful machine—namely the CCP, the Chinese Communist Party?

IMPORTANT AND VEXING QUESTIONS

After the Tibet crackdown, a discussion began about what democratic leaders should do: Should they boycott the Games, or the opening ceremony, in a symbolic gesture? (Virtually no one suggested the pulling out of teams.) There was also the question, Does attendance at the opening ceremony equal an endorsement of the Chinese government? A Human Rights Watch official said, "Attendance has been turned into endorsement, and endorsement without significant progress in exchange is wrong." Several European leaders have decided not to go. But President Bush is going, in a display of foreign-policy "realism" for which he gets little credit.

The International Olympic Committee is quite unhappy that trouble is being made—not by Communist China, but by critics of its behavior. IOC president Jacques Rogge fumed, "Politics invited itself into sports. We didn't call for politics to come." "Politics" is a funny word to use in this case: Objection to crushing people is "politics"? A regard for basic human rights is "politics"? Rogge said, "Tell them that we will rebound from this current crisis"—meaning, protests for Tibet. "The Olympic brand is strong," he said, and corporate sponsors are showing "great solidarity and support." Funny, "solidarity" used to mean, for example, standing with Lech Walesa and the Polish trade unions against the Communist government that ruled them. Now it means . . . not spoiling the CCP's "coming-out party."

In his reaction to the pro-Tibet protests, Rogge reminded athletes of the Olympic rules. They may respond freely to reporters' questions. But "the venues of the Games are not a place for proactive political or religious expression." And "sanctions and penalties will be applied in any cases considered to be a breach of IOC policy." Free World teams seem eager to maintain "peace." For example, the British Olympic Association has said that any athlete who talks about "political" issues will be expelled from the team. What would Gladstone, Disraeli, or Churchill say?

A sports daily in Italy reported that China has put the Bible on its list of items that cannot be brought into the country. Whether Bibles will be confiscated remains to be seen. What is sure is that Beijing is taking few chances with religion. The IOC requires a religious center at the Olympic village. And, as *The Economist* reported, China has broken with traditional Olympic practice and "not invited foreigners to serve as chaplains." Instead, the staff at the center "will belong to China's state-approved churches."

If anyone is more concerned than the Chinese Communists that the Beijing Olympics come off without disturbance, it is Western businessmen, who have invested millions. The *New York Times* editorialized that, "given [China's] mighty economic power, nobody really wants to antagonize Beijing." That is a major understatement. Corporate sponsors were appalled at the harassment of the Olympic Torch Relay. One company (Samsung) said nervously, "We believe the Olympic Games are not the place for demonstrations, and we hope that all people attending the Games recognize the importance of this." The *Wall Street Journal* reported, "It appears that most sponsors have made the decision to refrain from criticizing Beijing rather than risk angering the Chinese government"—another prize-winning understatement.

Indisputably, the Games mean a great deal to China—to the Chinese people, not merely to the ruling party. Several thousand children have been named "Aoyun," meaning Olympics. And China has come a long way from the days of most widespread oppression. Democratic governments have to figure out how to make their points to the Chinese government—if they have points—while respecting the sensitivities of the Chinese population.

In the last months, it has become clear that how you stand on the Olympics is a reflection of how you stand on China in general. Soft-liners are soft, hard-liners are hard. There is a school of thought that says nothing, nothing must ever be done that offends the Chinese Communists. Of boycotting the opening ceremony, one typical U.S. columnist says, "It would be a deadly insult and humiliation to an insecure government that would not forgive or forget." Another columnist warns of "inflaming Chinese nationalism and making Beijing more obdurate." You

It has become clear that how you stand on the Olympics is a reflection of how you stand on China in general. Soft-liners are soft, hard-liners are hard.

can read such sentiments in every newspaper and every magazine in the West.

The problem is, almost everything seems to offend the Chinese Communists. It is as easy to offend the Chinese Communists as it is to offend the Muslim radicals. And we are constantly warned, If you irk the Chinese, you will cause an explosion. (By the way, why does no one ever say that the belief that the Chinese are a bunch of temperamental toddlers, liable to throw a tantrum at any moment, is condescending or racist?)

Beijing authorities are deeply nervous about what may occur at the Games. Hu Jintao, the Chinese number one, was quoted in the *People's Armed Police News* saying, "Without security guarantees there cannot be a successful Olympic Games, and without security guarantees the national image will be lost"—*lost*. The mayor of Beijing, Wang Qishan, said, "We have to have a good Olympics, otherwise not only will our generation lose face but also our ancestors"—*our ancestors*. David Pryce-Jones and others tell us about shame and honor in the Middle East; the shame-and-honor equation in China is powerful as well.

There are several things to watch. For example, will the PRC delay or block the broadcast of the Games, if there are protests? There is concern about that. Also, how intrusive will the PRC be into the lives and affairs of visitors? The U.S. State Department has already warned Americans traveling to the Games:

> All visitors should be aware that they have no reasonable expectation of privacy in public or private locations. All hotel rooms and offices are considered to be subject to on-site or remote technical monitoring at all times. Hotel rooms, residences and offices may be accessed at any time without the occupant's consent or knowledge.

Why are the Olympic Games being held in such a place?

A big question is, What will President Bush do while in China? Will he meet with dissidents, as President Reagan did in the Soviet Union? Will he extract concessions, in exchange for his attendance? In other words, what good will he wring out of these Games, and what good will the rest of us wring out of them?

When I wrote about Beijing 2008 in 2000, before the IOC made the decision to give the Games to China, I canvassed dissidents for their opinion. I have canvassed them again. The consensus is: The Games should probably never have been granted to this state to begin with. But now that they have—take advantage of them. There is a window of opportunity, not to be missed. Jianli Yang says, "If we do nothing, this will definitely strengthen the hands of the Communists. They will be emboldened, knowing that they can get away with whatever they want." If, on the other hand, America and others press the Communists for reform, the Games may prove a help, even a boon.

In 1993, Wei Jingsheng was a pawn in China's Olympic game. He was released nine days before the IOC voted (on the 2000 Olympics), after 14 and a half years in prison. Today, he says that if the Communists have the kind of Games they want—smooth police-state sailing—they will get another 20 years: another 20 years in power. By the same token, "Chinese democratization will be delayed for another 20 years." But if the West can use this "window" to push for freedom and democracy—that is something else.

So, let us root for "something else." The CCP thinks the Olympic Games will be the best thing that ever happened to them. The rest of us must hope for a massive, glorious backfiring. **NR**

■ **PEOPLE**

'Writing Is a Spiritual Process'

The novels—and ideas—of Dean Koontz

JOHN J. MILLER

ABOUT 80 pages into *Intensity*, a 1995 novel by Dean Koontz, the heroine reflects upon her unlikely predicament. She's trapped in the motor home of a homicidal maniac who has just slaughtered a family. Chyna Shepherd has to decide what to do. "For a long time," writes Koontz of his 26-year-old character, "she'd known that being a victim was often a *choice* people made." It was an alluring choice, too. "Victimhood was seductive, a release from responsibility and caring: Fear would be transmuted into weary resignation; failure would no longer generate guilt but, instead, would spawn a comforting self-pity."

Chyna rejects victimhood. Her choice drives the plot forward as she engages in a battle of wits with a clever and resourceful killer.

Dean Koontz is the opposite of a victim. With more than 325 million books sold worldwide—about ten times the total number of volumes in the Library of Congress—he's one of the most successful authors of all time. Koontz is at the top of his game, too. Last November, Bantam published *The Darkest Evening of the Year*, which went on to become his best-selling hardcover yet. And although Koontz could quit writing tomorrow and never worry about his next meal, the pace of his work has quickened. Since 2003 he has turned out, at minimum, two novels per year. The latest, *Odd Hours*, is hitting bookstores just now. It's the fourth title in a new series that features what may be his most popular character.

A few living novelists, such as Danielle Steel, have sold more books than Koontz. Plenty of authors are more highly regarded, if only because critics tend to equate mass appeal with lowbrow taste. Koontz's prose is perhaps best described as fast-paced rather than poetic—he won't ever win the Nobel Prize. Yet he must be recognized as both a great storyteller and a novelist of ideas. His books grapple with vexing moral questions, such as utilitarian bioethics, the nature of freedom, and the reality of evil. The value of what Koontz has to say, combined with his deep reach into the culture, makes him one of the most important novelists writing today.

The 62-year-old Koontz lives in a magnificent home above Newport Beach, Calif., on a hill that overlooks the Pacific Ocean. The view from his office is splendid, but he faces away from it when he writes. The desk of this soft-spoken workaholic is strikingly uncluttered: It holds just a few objects, neatly arranged, including a framed black-and-white photo of Koontz and his wife, Gerda, attending a birthday party as young children. "You'll notice that I'm smiling and she's not—I see my future and perhaps she sees hers as well," he jokes. Beside his computer rest several mocked-up covers for *Your Heart Belongs to Me*, the novel he's currently writing. It's due in August and is sure to land on bestseller tables around Thanksgiving. Just outside his office, there's a 38-foot hallway lined on both sides with almost 5,000 unique editions of his books in different languages.

Bookstores generally stash Koontz's novels alongside Stephen King's on the horror shelves, a habit that began in the early 1980s when King, Koontz, and horror novels in general were starting to boom in popularity. "It was a marketing decision by one of my publishers," he says. "I never agreed with it because I like to mix up genres." Yet the label stuck. Many of his books are perhaps best described as suspense thrillers with dashes of science fiction, gothic terror, and screwball comedy. His stories always contain violence, but nothing unduly graphic. Lots of his novels have happily-ever-after conclusions. Others aren't quite so rosy. What they never are is bleak or hopeless. "A lot of horror writers are atheists or secularists who dwell on the dark side of the supernatural," he says. "I don't find that convincing. I try to present a more rounded view, a sense of wonder and mystery about life."

LEARNING, TEACHING, WRITING

His boyhood included a little bit of horror and a little bit of wonder. Koontz grew up poor in Bedford, Pa. His family didn't have indoor plumbing until he was eleven. "My mom was a good person but sickly," he says. "My dad was a monster—a nightmare figure for me." Koontz describes a man who drank to excess, gambled away his income, and womanized. "Books are what saved me," he says. "They took me out of that house and showed me that not everybody's family was like mine. They gave me something to aspire to." In high school, he also began to date Gerda.

As a teenager, Koontz worked at a supermarket and saved his money. Upon graduation, he enrolled at what was then Shippensburg State College. For an assignment in a creative-writing class, he submitted a short story called "Kittens." It might pass for something by Ray Bradbury, with its jarring blend of innocence and the macabre. Whatever the inspiration, the tale was good enough to encourage a professor to enter it in a fiction contest sponsored by *The Atlantic Monthly*. It took a prize, though the accolade didn't mean much to Koontz. "What really left an impression was that someone agreed to publish it for $50," he says. "Before that, it had never crossed my mind that I could make a living as a writer."

At first, he didn't. Koontz became a teacher in the Appalachian Poverty Program. "I worked for Goldwater in 1964, but my political allegiance had started to drift leftward," he says. "Then it was beaten down by the public-school system." Koontz was supposed to tutor at-risk kids who showed flickers of academic promise. In practice, his classroom became a dumping ground for students with behavioral problems. "It was eye-opening," he says. "I saw how government programs can have unforeseen consequences." A year later, he became a regular English teacher near Harrisburg and grew frustrated with school bureaucracy. Away from his students, he continued pounding away at his typewriter and made a series of small sales. He wondered whether he'd be able to survive as a full-time writer.

In 1969, Gerda proposed a deal: She would support them both for five years, during which time Dean would devote himself entirely to writing. If he failed to establish himself, he would go back to gainful employment. "The offer was typical of her—generous and realistic," says Koontz.

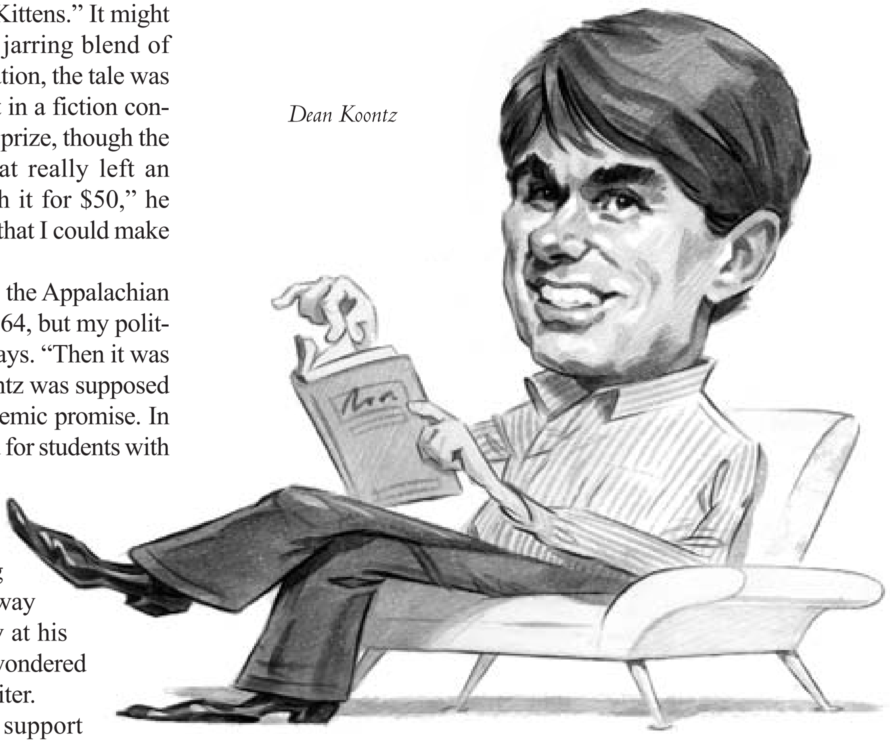
For the next four and a half years, Koontz churned out one manuscript after another. He wrote books and stories under his own name and several pen names. At one point, he wrote an entire novel in just a few days. His income grew steadily until 1974, when he and Gerda realized that he was in fact earning about as much money as nine-to-five work would have paid. Gerda quit her job. Ever since, she has acted as her husband's business manager, handling submissions, negotiating rights, and promoting his books.

During the 1970s, Koontz was successful but not wildly so. He and Gerda moved west, spending a year in Las Vegas and then relocating permanently to Orange County, Calif. Close to Hollywood, Koontz began to work on scripts for movies and television. He once penned an episode of *CHiPs*, the police drama starring Erik Estrada. Offers for similar opportunities rushed his way. "The money was good," he says, "but I worried that if I got more involved, I'd never go back to writing books."

Around this time, Koontz started to show up on the paperback bestseller lists. In 1979, he charted with *The Key to Midnight*, under the *nom de plume* Leigh Nichols. The next year, *Whispers* became his first bestseller with his own name on the cover. Other big books followed, including *Strangers*, *Watchers*, and *Lightning*. By the end of the 1980s, he was writing exclusively as Dean Koontz and reissuing older titles under his name after reacquiring the rights.

'MAKERS OF THEIR OWN LIVES'

Some of his ideas began to evolve as well. "My early novels were very Freudian and full of victimology," he says. "They sub-



Dean Koontz

DARREN GYGI

scribed to the belief that you are what you are because of what your parents or society or capitalism did to you." Koontz isn't sure what made him come to this realization—he says there was no eureka moment—though he suspects it began around the time his father died. "I did a lot of thinking about what had made him the way he was. He had a wonderful father and turned out rotten. I had a bad father and turned out all right."

By the 1990s, Koontz's shifting views were finding a place in his books. He says that *Mr. Murder*, a 1993 novel whose autobiographical elements include a hero who is a writer, marked a break from the past. "My characters started to become the makers of their own lives, to become who they are through their own choices." His protagonists are good-hearted and sympathetic even though they often come from troubled backgrounds. His villains are narcissistic and despicable and don't have anyone to blame but themselves.

Koontz continued exploring these themes in his next novel, *Dark Rivers of the Heart*, whose hero is the son of a sociopath. "It's astonishing how a theory as wrongheaded as Freudianism can capture a culture and get inside its institutions," says Koontz. "It has deranged our criminal-justice system with the idea that everyone's a victim of his past and ready for rehabilitation." (The hardcover edition of the book also included an afterword that cheered libertarians with its criticism of asset-forfeiture laws, which play a role in the plot.)

When Koontz looks at modern society, he sees lots of derangement, and he doesn't shy away from saying so. His books are full of asides that combine political opinion with humor. "I chafe at the injustice of the Nobel Prize Committee awarding peace prizes to the likes of Yasser Arafat while failing year after year to honor the person who invented the Velcro-sealed disposable diaper," quips the narrator of *Life Expectancy*. In another book, Koontz comments: "Many murderous thugs just hiked across the unprotected border or used international airlines and—wearing T-shirts that proclaimed DEATH TO ALL JEWS in Arabic—breezed through U.S. checkpoints, where highly suspicious federal security personnel strip-searched Irish grandmothers and Boy Scouts on field trips." Other novelists are a frequent target as well. In *Brother Odd*, Koontz satirizes *The Da Vinci Code*.

COMPASSIONATE CONSERVATIVE

Despite these occasional sharp edges, the most singular quality of Koontz's books is their sense of compassion. When the sadistic villain of *Intensity* outlines his murderous philosophy to Chyna Shepherd, she replies, "The most intense experience of all is showing mercy." The presence of this sentiment in a Koontz novel should perhaps not be surprising: In real life, he operates a private foundation that assists critically ill children and the disabled, and promotes dog welfare (he is a great lover of canines).

A typical Koontz book features vulnerable characters, often children with handicaps such as Down syndrome or brittle-bone disease. The plots hinge on the need to protect them from harm. In *Velocity*, the hero must defend a Terri Schiavo–like woman not only from a killer, but also from a doctor who wants to yank out her feeding tube. The doctor means well but doesn't know any better. As Koontz's narrator explains, "the university that turned him out had infected him with what they call 'utilitarian ethics.'"

"I can't remember how I crossed paths with this worldview," says Koontz. "It had to be something to do with Peter Singer and recoiling from some quote of his." (Singer is a Princeton professor who has called for euthanizing crippled newborns.) Bioethics lies at the heart of *One Door Away from Heaven*, a 2001 novel and one of Koontz's longest. It features a disabled girl, a ruthless stepfather, UFO sightings, a quest for redemption, and irreverent humor. In an author's note at the end, Koontz lays out his concern:

> Utilitarian bioethics as portrayed in *One Door Away from Heaven* is unfortunately not a figment of my imagination, but a real threat to you and to everyone you love. This philosophy embodies the antihuman essence of fascism, expresses the contempt for individual freedom and for the disabled and the frail that has in the past marked every form of totalitarianism. One day our great universities will be required to redeem themselves from the shame of having honored and promulgated ethicists who would excuse and facilitate the killing of the disabled, the weak, and the elderly.

Koontz goes on to recommend *Culture of Death*, a book by Wesley J. Smith that makes a similar argument. At the time, he didn't know Smith (who has written for NATIONAL REVIEW). Since then, they've become friends. Koontz dedicated *The Husband*, a 2006 thriller, to Smith and his wife, Debra J. Saunders, a right-of-center newspaper columnist.

Some readers probably find Koontz's beliefs backward and his advocacy of them grating. For his admirers, however, he balances the need to tell a good story with his determination to advance certain beliefs. One of his techniques is to create a narrative voice that's utterly disarming, as he has done so effectively in the books featuring Odd Thomas, a fry cook who can see ghosts. "Odd was a gift to me," says Koontz. He explains that, while he was writing an unrelated novel, this new character popped into his mind and compelled him to draft the first chapter of what is now a four-book series.

Odd is a charming and humble young man whose *Sixth Sense*–like powers throw him into harrowing situations that call for feats of selfless valor. Eccentric secondary characters populate his world, including an obese mystery writer with six fingers named Little Ozzie, a phone-sex operator who turns kidnapper, and Brother Knuckles, a monk who was once a mobster. The books also feature a scene in which the pajama-clad ghost of Lyndon B. Johnson steps off a bus and moons Odd Thomas.

After the publication of *Forever Odd*, the second in the series, Wesley J. Smith called the author. "I told him he was writing the story of a saint, of someone who continually simplifies his life and increases his service to others," says Smith. Koontz, a Catholic convert, disagreed but kept writing about his ghost seer. "You know what?" says Koontz. "My friend was right." He projects that the complete tale of Odd Thomas will unfold over the course of six or seven books.

"As I've gotten older, the spiritual element has come a little more to the fore in my books," admits Koontz. "I've found that the act of writing is itself a spiritual process. You're in communion with something greater than yourself. God created us in His image, and He gave us our creativity."

That's one trait Koontz has in abundance, and he keeps pouring it into a corpus of books whose purpose goes beyond mere escapism. Odd Thomas, a master of understatement, may have put it best: "I have learned a great deal from novels. Some of it is even true." **NR**

the long view

ROB LONG

AFTRA—American Federation of Television and Radio Artists/News Division Mental Health Clinic—Therapist’s Notes

First Session:

Therapist begins by welcoming the group and congratulating the patients on their courage and commitment to becoming healthier and more emotionally balanced reporters and pundits. Except for Patient Keith O., who attends the session via satellite, the entire on-air contingent of pundits and reporters from MSNBC and CNN are seated in a circle. As many of the faces are well-known, Therapist forgoes the usual introductory preliminaries. “You’re all here because you recognize that there’s a problem in your lives, and you’ve made an important step toward mental health,” says Therapist.

The session kicks off with a simple “okay/not okay” exercise, in which each member of the group in turn names something that’s “okay” to think and/or feel about Barack Obama, and something that’s “not okay” to think, feel, or more importantly act out in regard to the senator.

Therapist offers an example. It’s “okay” to like the senator and wish him well; it’s “not okay” to cut out pictures of him and his wife from magazines and staple your face over Michelle’s.

The group looks baffled by this. Patient Keith O. is especially vexed. Therapist tries to draw him out by asking for an “okay/not okay” contribution from him. He thinks for a moment, then suggests that it’s “okay to be an enthusiastic supporter of Senator Obama, but it’s not okay to love him so much you actually want to eat him, to physically ingest his being into yours, until you and he become one entity.”

It’s clear that the Obama Obsessives group is going to be a challenge.

Second Session:

The second session begins on a sour note. Some in the MSNBC contingent take issue with some of the CNN coverage, which they deem insufficiently loving toward the senator. The CNN reporters and pundits are told they “just don’t understand” the senator like the MSNBC group does. It erupts into a bitter competition over exactly whom he would choose as a “BFF.” (Note: Therapist was unaware of this slang term for “Best Friend Forever” until a subsequent Wikipedia search.)

Therapist takes the opportunity to open a discussion of what, in fact, it means to be a “friend” of a candidate, let alone a “Best Friend Forever.” Therapist tries to explain to patients that feelings of this kind—obsessive, devotional, almost cult-like worship of the remote and indifferent “celebrity”—are a typical emotional experience for young prepubescents (especially females, though young males often develop strong worshipful attachments to sports and music heroes), but that as a person matures emotionally, he or she often discovers that truly meaningful relationships can only be had with people who actually exist and interact within a person’s circle. Therefore, a person one is “covering” as part of one’s “job” as an “objective” and “professional” “journalist” or “pundit” cannot be said to be within one’s circle. That person is an “object” and a certain emotional distance is appropriate.

The group thinks about this for a moment. It’s an important point, and it seems to be making an impact.

Patient Keith O. then chimes in that he wonders what the senator smells like, up close. He suggests something called “lavender harvest.”

Patient Jonathan A. counters with “vanilla mint spice.”

The conversation devolves from there.

Third Session:

As this is our final no-copay session, Therapist attempts to remind patients of the importance of seeing “the whole person.” It’s perfectly understandable that the collective journalist class would admire or be inspired by a political figure such as Barack Obama, but Therapist tries to convey that it’s possible to “like” someone while at the same time seeing his flaws. For instance, Therapist says, let’s talk about Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

Patient Keith O. then interjects, telling the group that he would like to trap the senator in the basement of a remote house, feeding him only scraps and a little water, until the senator realizes how deeply Patient Keith O. loves him, and how the two of them are meant for each other, to be together, forever and ever and ever.

Patient Anderson C. suggests that Senator Obama might finally take notice of him if he murdered a prominent celebrity.

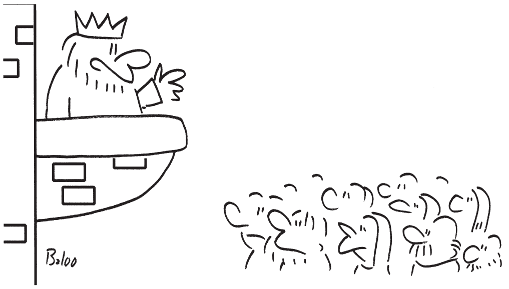
Other patients contribute similar fantasies, each ending with the idol-object (Senator Obama) and the devoted subject linked and unified into a single emotional unit.

The session ends with no progress. The reporters and pundits file out, still deeply mentally disturbed.

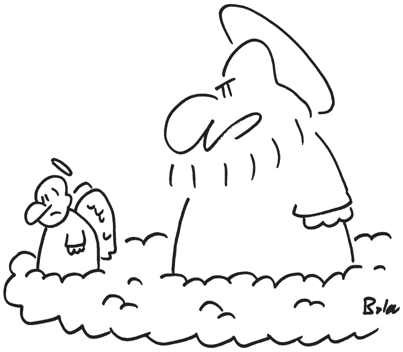
Diagnosis: hysteria and/or infant wish-fulfillment, coupled with malignant narcissism.

Suggested treatment: none.

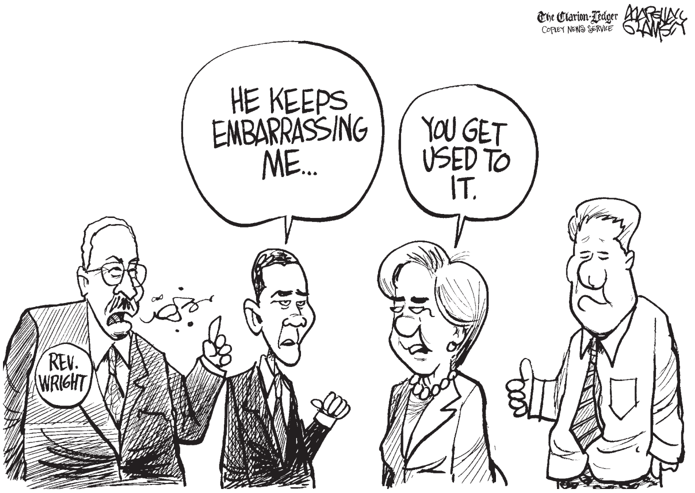
HELP!!!!

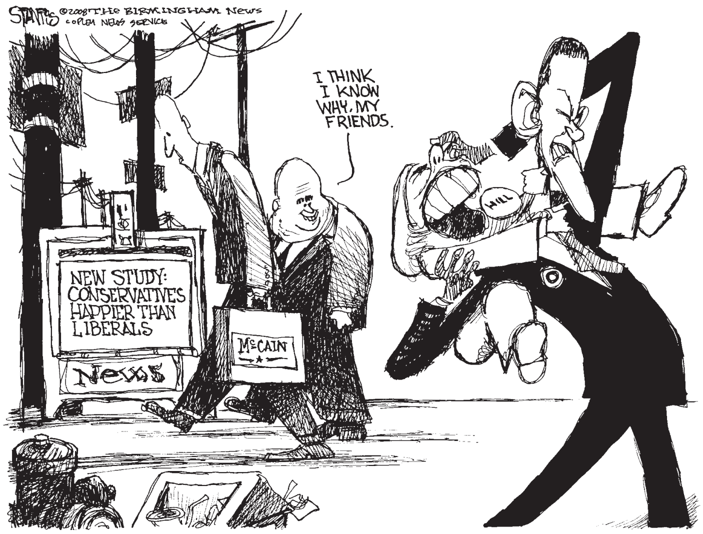


"Now, most Huns are hard-working, law-abiding citizens—I'm only talking about extremist *Huns . . ."*



"What?—All that work, and now they don't even *believe* in *evolution?"*


The Clarion-Ledger
Copley News Service
Marshall Ramsey
HE KEEPS EMBARRASSING ME...
YOU GET USED TO IT.
REV. WRIGHT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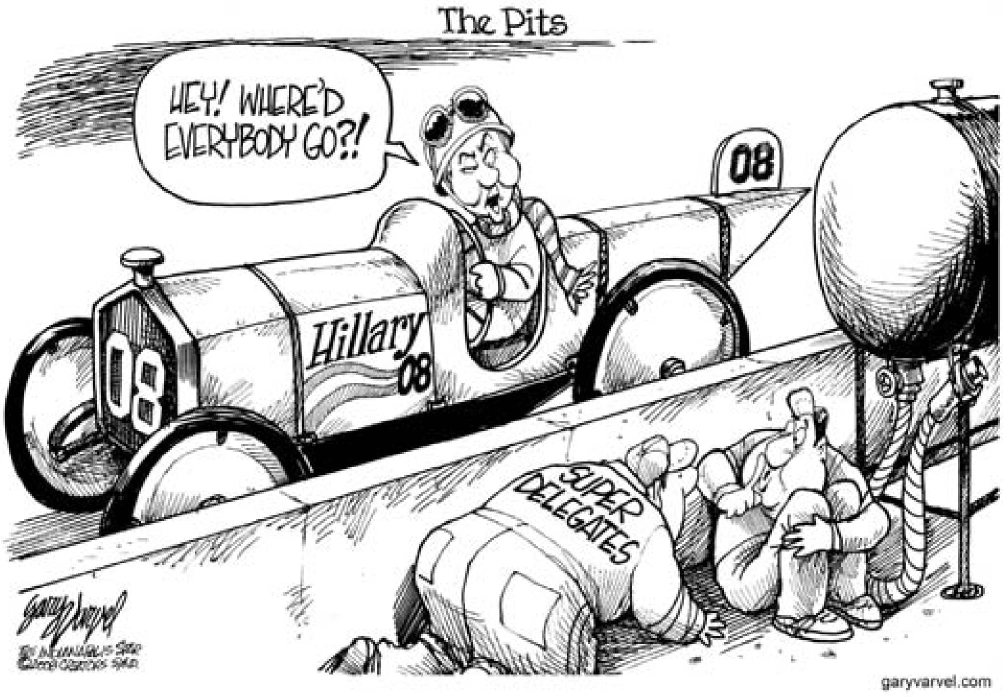
I THINK I KNOW WHY, MY FRIENDS.
NEW STUDY: CONSERVATIVES HAPPIER THAN LIBERALS
NEWS
McCAIN
HILL


The Pits
HEY! WHERE'D EVERYBODY GO?!
08
08
Hillary 08
SUPER DELEGATES
Gary Varvel
garyvarvel.com

THE NATIONAL REVIEW

Sailing November 8–15 on

2008 Post-Election Cruise

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Eurodam, Meodam, we'll all have seven d**n good nights aboard this beautiful ship in November!

as we visit Grand Turk, San Juan, St. Thomas, Half Moon Cay, and Ft. Lauderdale

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Fast forward to November 5th—the morning after. Whether you find yourself bemoaning four looming years of President Obama or Rodham (or, for some, worrying if President-Elect McCain will keep his promises to conservatives), or whether you're flabbergasted by how a bigger and badder Democrat-controlled Capitol Hill will handle policy (or: you're stunned that the GOP picked up seats!), make sure you're packing your luggage and preparing for the *Eurodam*, your floating luxury getaway for scintillating discussion of the elections and their consequences—and on all other major current events (including the state of the U.S. economy) and trends.

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There are countless reasons to come (over 180 cabins have already been booked!), but none better than the luminaries who will be aboard this luxury trip. This truly extraordinary gathering is one of the best ensembles we've ever had on an *NR* cruise, which guarantees that our seminar sessions (featuring ample audience "Q & A") will be fascinating.

✔ Imagine **Mitt Romney**, Club for Growth boss **Pat Toomey**, and **William McGurn** (once *NR*'s D.C. Bureau Chief and a former *Wall Street Journal* chief editorial writer)providing their expert take on the elections, their consequences, and the state of the GOP.

✔ Some of our most rewarding *NR* cruise experiences have been the informed interchanges between **Bernard Lewis** and **Victor Davis Hanson** on the brutal revival of the age-old struggle between Islam and the West. These academic giants—along with terrorism expert **Andy McCarthy**—will provide their razor-sharp insights on America's dealings in Iraq, the Middle East, and the Muslim world.

✔ Can you find better, more

JOIN US FOR SEVEN BALMY DAYS AND COOL CONSERVATIVE NIGHTS

DAY/DATE	PORT	ARRIVE	DEPART	SPECIAL EVENT
Sat./Nov. 8	Ft. Lauderdale, FL		5:00PM	evening cocktail reception
Sun./Nov. 9	AT SEA			morning/afternoon seminars
Mon./Nov. 10	Providenciales, Turks & Caicos	7:00 AM	3:00PM	afternoon seminar late-night smoker
Tue./Nov. 11	San Juan, Puerto Rico	10:00AM	11:00PM	
Wed./Nov. 12	St. Thomas, USVI	8:00AM	5:00PM	evening cocktail reception
Thu./Nov. 13	AT SEA			morning/afternoon seminars late-night smoker
Fri./Nov. 14	Half Moon Cay	8:00AM	4:00PM	afternoon seminar evening cocktail reception
Sat./Nov. 15	Ft. Lauderdale, FL	7:00AM		

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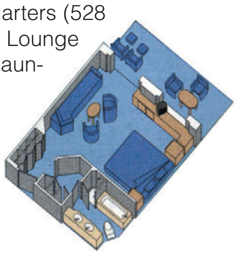
Ages infant to17: $613	Ages 18 and over: $1,073

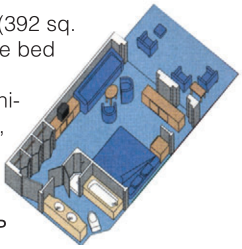
DELUXE SUITE Magnificent luxury quarters (528 sq. ft.) features use of exclusive Neptune Lounge and personal concierge, complimentary laundry, pressing and dry-cleaning service. Large private verandah, king-size bed (convertible to 2 twins), whirlpool bath/shower, dressing room, large sitting area, DVD, mini-bar, and refrigerator.



Category SA

DOUBLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 4,513 P/P
SINGLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 8,013

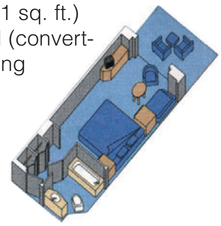
SUPERIOR SUITE Grand stateroom (392 sq. ft.) features private verandah, queen-size bed (convertible to 2 twin beds), whirlpool bath/shower, large sitting area, DVD, mini-bar, refrigerator, floor-to-ceiling windows, and much more.



Category SS

DOUBLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 3,513 P/P
SINGLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 6,013

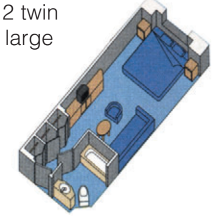
DELUXE OUTSIDE Spacious cabin (241 sq. ft.) features private verandah, queen-size bed (convertible to 2 twin beds), bath with shower, sitting area, mini-bar, tv, refrigerator, and floor-to-ceiling windows.



Categories VA / VB / VC

DOUBLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 2,913 P/P
SINGLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 4,413

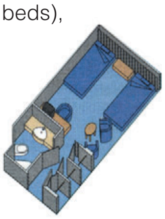
LARGE OCEAN VIEW Comfortable quarters (190 sq. ft.) features queen-size bed (convertible to 2 twin beds), bathtub with shower, sitting area, tv, large ocean-view windows.



Category D

DOUBLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 2,413 P/P
SINGLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 3,313

LARGE INSIDE Cozy but ample cabin quarters (185 sq. ft.) features queen-size bed (convertible to 2 twin beds), bathtub with shower, sitting area, tv.



Category K

DOUBLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 1,813 P/P
SINGLE OCCUPANCY RATE:	$ 2,513

insightful, or wittier social commentary than from the likes of **Mark Steyn**, **Christopher Buckley**, **Rob Long**, or **Deroy Murdock**? Toss media expert **Brent Bozell**, Arizona state policy maven **Darcy Olsen**, and Acton Institute chief **Fr. Robert Sirico** into the fray, and you have a sterling cast to review the ever-leftward tilt of the Fourth Estate and state government.

✓ And they'll be joined in all the elucidating and analyzing of the 2008 elections by *NR*'s editorial heavyweights, including **Jonah Goldberg**, **Kathryn Jean Lopez**, **Kate O'Beirne**, **Ramesh Ponnuru**, **Jay Nordlinger**, and **John Miller**.

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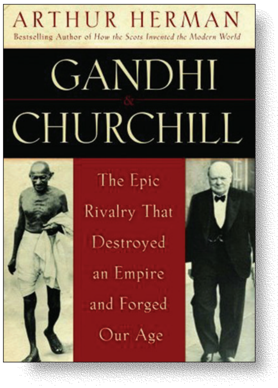
books, arts & manners

Parallel Lives


ARTHUR HERMAN
Bestselling Author of How the Scots Invented the Modern World
GANDHI & CHURCHILL
The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age

Gandhi & Churchill: The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age, by Arthur Herman (Bantam, 736 pp., $30)

PAUL JOHNSON

ARTHUR HERMAN clearly believes in being provocative: His best-known book is titled *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*. This one has as its subtitle *The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*, which is so outlandish that it may put off readers; and that would be a pity, since Herman has worked hard and his book contains much interesting matter, forcefully presented. Moreover, the subject itself is compelling.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi—known as Gandhiji, the Mahatma, and many other titles based in respect and affection—was born in 1869, making him five years older than Churchill. He came from a caste of *banias*, or merchants, and his father was an administrator, chief minister of a small territory northwest of Bombay. His mother tongue was Gujarati, spoken by a people noted alike for their hard-headed sense of business (Gandhi means "grocer") and intense piety. Many belong to the Jain religion, which insists on non-violence. Gandhi's mother was much given to fasting, vows, and meticulous performance of religious duties. At 13, Gandhi was married to the daughter of a merchant, but we don't hear much more of her. At 18, he was sent to London to study law at the Middle Temple, and—for crossing the sea—judged an outcast. He qualified, took up dancing, had elocution lessons, and frequented "watering places," rather like his younger contemporary Nehru. But Nehru, who went to Harrow (Churchill's school), became Anglicized in a way Gandhi never did.

He practiced law in South Africa, where he was radicalized, becoming spokesman for the large Indian community in Natal. In that role he visited London as part of a delegation, and had his one meeting with Churchill, then under-secretary for the colonies. It was amicable, but afterwards Gandhi accused Churchill of deceiving him, which seems unlikely. Already Gandhi was trying to devise a perfect and holy way of life for himself, fasting, dieting, making his own clothes, performing menial household tasks, and preaching non-violence. He raised three ambulance units—during the Boer War, the Zulu War, and World War I—and was awarded two campaign medals and the gold medal of the Viceroy of India after his return to the subcontinent in 1915. He even urged Indians to join the British army.

The enormous household was financed by Hindu millionaires, one of whom noted: 'It costs a great deal to keep Gandhiji in poverty.'

In 1919, however, he decided the British must leave India, and devoted the rest of his life to this cause. As weapons he used strikes (known as the *hartal*), passive resistance, boycotts, and other forms of non-violence. He adopted a special style of dress: white loincloth, a sort of white shawl, and sandals, all homemade. He supported himself with a long stick, and favored all with a wide, toothless smile. He created a community of his own, devoted to prayer, spinning, "silent days," the most meager diet, and an absolute ban on all luxuries, even on some essentials. He was attended by numerous young women who slept close to him, though there was no sex. The enormous household was financed by a group of Hindu millionaires, one of whom noted: "It costs a great deal to keep Gandhiji in poverty."

Herman describes Gandhi's activities between the wars, which included passive resistance punctuated by spells of imprisonment and negotiation, in great detail and (on the whole) accurately and fairly. Gandhi believed India was entitled to freedom, to pursue its own religious way of life without British interference. He thought this could be achieved while also preserving its unity and keeping the extremists of all kinds under control. Independence was achieved without a war in 1947, thanks to the post-war Labour government. Whether it was Gandhi and his methods, or Nehru and his political organization, the Congress party, that played the bigger part in the process is matter for argument. But unity was lost, there were countless victims of communal strife, and one of them was Gandhi himself, assassinated by a Hindu zealot in 1948.

Winston Churchill served in India as a young officer in a Hussar regiment of cavalry from 1896 to 1900, interrupted by adventures in the Sudan at the Battle of Omdurman, where he took part in a cavalry charge, and the Boer War, where he was taken prisoner and escaped. He saw action in India as a member of the Malakand Field Force in 1897, about which exploit he wrote his first, highly successful book, and as a member of the Tirah Expeditionary Force in 1898. He loved India, because it was there that he educated himself. Troops rose very early and worked hard until it got hot, then rested until the sun went down, when the delights of the evening began. Churchill used the rest time to read, beginning with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and Macaulay's *History of England*, and progressing through such

Mr. Johnson is a historian and journalist, and the author most recently of *Heroes: From Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar to Churchill and de Gaulle.*

tomes as Winwood Reade's *Martyrdom of Man*, which made him a skeptic for life, and Darwin's *Origin of Species*. India also gave him a love of polo, which he played enthusiastically till in his 50s, and made him a collector of butterflies, to which the special Butterfly House at Chartwell still testifies.

Churchill's India was the subcontinent of the Raj, in which a tiny number of white officials (about 2,000) and a few white regiments (about 30,000 troops from Britain, in normal times), plus a white-officered "native" army, ruled 400 million. This meant that the Raj ruled essentially by consent. Churchill believed that it gave India peace and unity by impartially promoting the interests of Indians of all races and religions, castes and incomes, and that if this disinterested power were removed, India would fall apart, millions would die, and progress would be halted and reversed. Churchill had little impact on events in India. He worked hard in Parliament to alter or kill the giant Government of India bill of 1935, the first major step toward independence, but after it was passed he accepted it, as he always accepted decisions by Parliament, and advised all concerned, including Gandhi, to make it work. He was not a diehard. During World War II, he exercised immense powers, but did not use them to halt or reverse India's slow trudge to freedom, and the viceroy he appointed there, Lord Wavell, was in all essentials a liberal. The need to put victory in war first and last did not allow him to develop an Indian policy of his own. Thrown from power in 1945, he watched apprehensively while the Labour government gave India independence in 1947, having already conceded the principle of partition, which split the subcontinent into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. The result, in the riots that followed, was nearly 2 million dead.

It is often said that Churchill's knowledge of India was shallow and out of date. But he was proved right in his prediction that independence would mean the end of unity. Gandhi had argued that the Hindu–Muslim divide was superficial and could be bridged by patience and statesmanship. He was proved totally wrong on this fundamental point. Not only was Pakistan created, despite all his efforts, but it in turn split into two, when the eastern section, now Bangladesh, refused to accept government by the western section. The key problem of Kashmir—the most beautiful part of the subcontinent, where the elite was Hindu and the majority population Muslim—was left unsolved by partition, and smolders away. It has already caused two wars between India and Pakistan; if the Muslim extremists take over Pakistan, a nuclear exchange may well occur, justifying Churchill's worst fears.

In the meantime, India has taken the route of high technology and advanced capitalism, and is racing along it. For the first time scores of millions of Indians are tasting affluence. By mid-century India will have over a billion inhabitants and, quite possibly, the world's largest economy after the United States. This prospect would have delighted Churchill, who always believed that the Raj had set India's feet firmly on the road to long-term prosperity. It would have horrified Gandhi, who deplored Western living standards and wanted Indians to lead simple, pure, and prayerful lives close to the subsistence level. His chief reason for espousing independence was that India would thereby escape the corruption of the West. So who was right about India? The answer is that both Churchill and Gandhi were right—and both were wrong. But this juxtaposition of these two extraordinary men makes for a fascinating story. **NR**

Touring the Horizon

The Second World:
Empires and Influence in the New
Global Order, by Parag Khanna
(Random House, 496 pp., $29)

THOMAS P. M. BARNETT

PARAG KHANNA'S *The Second World* is a great book that deserves wide reading but not wide debate. Some incorrectly position Khanna between Fukuyama's *End of History* and Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. He is more accurately triangulated with historian-strategist Robert Kaplan and columnist-guru Thomas Friedman: brilliantly observant like Kaplan and epigrammatically clever like Friedman, but simply not up to the task of making strategic sense of it all. When it comes to grand strategic vision, Khanna basically punts, tossing off a 19th-century rehash of hemispheric empires. Nonetheless, this is an impressive first book by an author who's likely, as he matures (he just passed

Mr. Barnett is the author of *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the 21st Century.*

CHINESE RUG

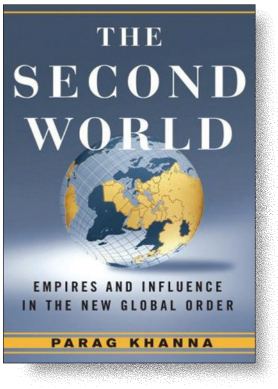
The ponies at our feet—the blue ones laze;
The brown stand upright, though some bow to nibble—
Are placid, but a tad bit crude and hokey.
(One might be put in mind of Gumby's Pokey,
Considering the 'toonish lines that form
Them in the fabric where they gaze or graze.
But then again, one might *not* be. Why quibble,
When even though we trample them, they warm
Our feet on winter nights as we prepare
To slip away inside our downy sock?)
We sleep away, while they—all wooly seven
Of them—beneath blue peaks that point at heaven,
Stay wide awake, yet calmly unaware
They'll soon be in the dark. We set the clock.

—LEN KRISAK

30), to produce much better strategic analysis to go along with his already well-developed ear for hearing what locals are actually saying—a skill in short supply right now in America.

Khanna's volume really consists of two books: a thrilling *tour d'horizon* of the world that populates five very meaty layers of a would-be grand strategic sandwich—wrapped by a "big idea" essay that ultimately fails to hold the concoction together. The "big idea" in a nutshell: America's world order is crumbling while China's alternative universe is booming; meanwhile, Europe isn't merely plodding along but is redefining human history by pioneering the world's first multinational superstate—America's two-plus-centuries-old version notwithstanding. Inevitably, each superpower will dominate its own hemisphere, meaning America will hold on—just barely—to Latin America, Asia will be for Asians (with China calling all the shots), and Europe will not only absorb everybody right up to the Urals but likewise recreate the contours of the Roman Empire and basically pick up sub-Saharan Africa in the bargain. Oh, and the medium-sized states that'll be absorbed into these empires actually hold the balance of world power in their hands . . . uh . . . when they're not being absorbed by these unstoppable empires that, it turns out in the end, actually need to be nice to one another to avoid triggering the next world war.

The first problem with this all-encompassing argument is that Khanna personifies nations and their governments too much. While giving them personalities and putting them on the analytical couch yields a mother lode of witty lines (a favorite of mine being, "China is only dating Latin America, not marrying it"), often the result comes off as merely glib ("But Azerbaijan was blessed with oil, not wisdom"). Most experts agree that globalization empowers non-state actors more than states, leading to the declining importance of governments in shaping our collective future, but in Khanna's world, governments seem to act with a degree of freedom and coherent intelligence (save for those idiot Azeris) that strikes me as quaint.



Second, Khanna seems to come from the "power" school of international relations, in that he makes a near fetish of the concept. Whatever power consists of, China is getting lots more while Europe is banking it incrementally, which should come in handy as it gets old (hold that thought!). Of course, freaked-out fatty America is rapidly losing virility: Our military can't run the world all by itself, therefore we are proven increasingly irrelevant in the all-important power category. China, we are told, has "neutered" America throughout most of Asia, as any power gain by Beijing—clearly—results in a zero-sum power loss for us. China "seduces" its neighbors (with whom, one suspects, it will sleep, but also not marry) with its raw market power and, if offended, need merely signal that another nation has "hurt the feelings of the Chinese people" to exact "tribute." Why? The "incalculable potential" of these 1.3 billion people has clearly slated China to "supplant the United States as the world's leading power." But don't forget about the "amplifying power" of China's 55-million-strong diaspora that, in apparent lockstep with Beijing's power-spreading plans for regional and then global domination, executes as required.

The biggest problem with this grand thesis is that it compels Khanna to gloss over defects in China and Europe while exaggerating their virtues. The author also rather crudely bashes America throughout, in keeping with today's intellectual sophistry of extrapolating the Bush administration's failures to a complete indictment of our entire way of life and the supposed end of American empire.

In Khanna's account, the Chinese and Europeans apparently calculate every national move to the *n*th degree, but cowboy America is a mass of conflicting impulses and deep-seated paranoia. America's cruel capitalism is completely beyond the control of our clueless government bureaucracy whereas China, blessed with a Communist party that is "more powerful, sophisticated, and complex than any Chinese dynasty in history," confidently manipulates its "tightly regulated capitalist economy" that's blessed with a rising "generation of technocrats competing more or less meritocratically for influence" within a political system apparently unmarred by corruption or nepotism. Bloated America, which "is not a healthy country compared to its first-world peers," is increasingly outclassed both economically and politically by the European Union superstate, which, despite purposefully making itself poorer each time it expands eastward, apparently grows more powerful as it does so. Thus morally sick America, burdened by military empire, may well be brought down by its irrational Christianity (just as the Roman Empire was!), while Brussels, the "new Rome," marches confidently east- and southward.

For someone so concerned with power rankings and given to bold, forward-leaning statements ("As Turkey becomes more European, Europe becomes more Turkish"), Khanna is puzzlingly casual in his treatment of demographics. The reality of Europe's aging profile is apparently yet another source of imperial power, not a weakness as so many serious observers have warned. Khanna declares in one

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breath that “Europe *needs* to expand, or Europe will die,” but then quickly adds that “Europe’s growing diversity makes European-ness a gradually attainable ideal rather than a mythical Platonic form, transforming Europe’s identities from tribal to cosmopolitan.” *Whew!* And here I was thinking it was going to be hard! But apparently that fabled Brussels bureaucrat, sitting in his “office of wall-to-wall technocratic studies,” has already cracked the code: “The ‘new European commonwealth’ has come to embody an ancient imperial truism that the Romans, Mongols, and Ottomans understood but that the Soviet Union never did: A successful empire cannot be racist.” Don’t get me wrong: I like Khanna’s optimism about the EU, but just tossing off the question of Europe’s cultural identity as it grows simultaneously older and more Muslim is strategically sophomoric.

And Khanna’s uncritical take on China’s demographics is downright stunning. He basically ignores the tsunami of aging that will generate a gargantuan body count of impoverished rural elders over the next couple of decades. It’s called the “4:2:1 problem”: four grandparents, two parents, and one child to rue them all. Sure, it’s glorious to be rich, but China’s going to get awfully old before it gets wealthy enough to handle that stunning burden. Meanwhile, Khanna confidently intones that “the Pacific Era will be led by China—and no one else.” How to reconcile such ambition with aging? We’re told that the Chinese are seriously checking out the EU’s social-welfare models. Hmm; sounds like a world-conquering plan to me.

As for Khanna’s much-hyped “Greater Chinese Co-Prosperity Sphere,” here we’re treated with the specter of Chinese baby-boomers buying retirement properties “from Penang to Bali” while Beijing grants its neighbors “greater market access and sustain[s] trade deficits . . . in exchange for raw materials, defense agreements, and diplomatic pledges to lean its way.” The realist in me fears that all we’re really seeing here is China doing to all of Asia what it’s already done to itself: recklessly rapid development that has essentially bankrupted an already thin environmental base. What does Khanna have to say about China’s environment? He quickly notes that China sports some of the world’s dirtiest cities and then moves on to wind farms and solar power and says Beijing will offshore its pollutants to remote regions, just as a “giant Singapore” would.

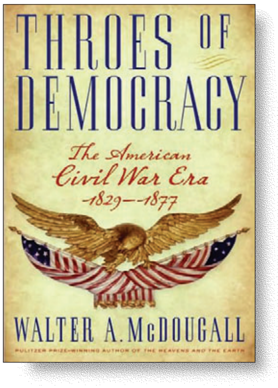
China likewise gets a pass on its skyrocketing food and water requirements. Many serious students of globalization’s rising resource requirements see a future of not just hyper-connectivity among societies but hyper-dependency among economies—especially with regard to food. In that world, I see national governments working the middle instead of commanding the strategic heights. But Khanna is having none of that: No, we’ll end up with George Orwell’s competing empires of Eurasia, Eastasia, and Oceania increasingly scrapping with one another over dwindling resources, with the only question being, “How will the next world war be averted?” Khanna’s answer is unsurprising: With three hemispheric empires on the rise, the next step in good global governance is a “three-legged U.S.-EU-China stool” where “peace, justice, and order will only follow from equilibrium.”

At this point I start to get angry: Khanna has spent all this time getting me upset about China’s takeover of the planet and the EU’s snatching up of its leftovers, while stupid, fat America can’t get off the couch. But then he says a slimmed-down G-8 + China can ensure world peace. So why all the *Sturm und Drang*?

I’ll tell you why. Khanna, after visiting 100 countries over several years to build up all these impressions, couldn’t be satisfied doing what the interior of this book accomplishes magnificently: giving the reader a series of witty, intelligent, insightful portraits of regions and countries struggling to find their way amid globalization’s explosive advance. I mean, that’s an incredibly useful book to read, but it’s not a “big idea” book to market. So either Khanna or his publisher decided to obscure this brilliant globalization travelogue with clichéd images of empires and world war and a “second world” either held in the balance or holding the balance (I honestly had trouble figuring out which).

Read this book as I’ve suggested. No, it’s nowhere near a “definitive guide to world politics for years to come,” as its jacket copy promises, but it is an intelligent, nuanced, and highly informative tour of globalization’s mid-range economies today, and you’ll be a lot smarter for exploring these places with such a smart guide. **NR**

More Than Hustlers



Throes of Democracy:
The American Civil War Era,
1829–1877, by Walter A. McDougall
(Harper, 816 pp., $34.95)

JAY WINIK

A NUMBER of traits tend to characterize American historians: Some embrace narrative, while others are more interested in solving historical puzzles; some excel at biography or the great-man view of history, while others provide a bottom-up account—the story of women or working men, slaves or freedmen, or Native Americans; and some write with a veneer of objectivity, while others freely wear their opinions on their sleeves. Back in graduate school, I was taught about J. H. Hexter’s maxim that some historians are splitters whereas others are lumpers, which is to say some delve into the particulars of history while others deal in large overarching themes. So what is Walter McDougall? He, like his new book, is actually quite difficult to characterize. In countless ways *Throes of Democracy* is a curious, almost eccentric work, but it’s also a significant one, and more often than not a breath of fresh air.

For starters, it is a sprawling kaleidoscope of America stretching from the mercurial, irreverent rise of Andrew Jackson

Mr. Winik is the author of *The Great Upheaval: America and the Birth of the Modern World 1788–1800* and *April 1865*.

and the first mumblings of early-19th-century secessionism to the tumultuous end of Reconstruction. In between we encounter two wars, the Mexican War and the Civil War; regional splits and frontier tensions; a splendid array of writers, thinkers, politicians, warriors, and millenarians; and the rise of railroads, robber barons, racial bigotry, reformers, black Baptist churches, and urban poverty.

McDougall is by turns wry, disdainful, jarringly sarcastic, penetrating, controversial, and—whether you agree with him or not—almost always fascinating. A few examples: Andrew Jackson entered the White House in a "foul mood" and stayed that way for "eight years." Of the tragic Indian massacres, McDougall mordantly notes that white Americans killed one another with seemingly reckless abandon in pursuit of "their national destiny," so "why not smaller numbers of 'savages'?" As for corruption in the Grant administration, it was "no worse than most"; and the purpose of America early on was not simply to build a new Jerusalem but to "keep running."

McDougall does have a theme and it's intriguing: Americans as "hustlers," in both the positive and the negative sense. Thus, "America is the richest, most creative civilization on earth," but it's also awash in corruption. Americans are dynamic, creative, and entrepreneurial, but they have also evaded taxes and taken kickbacks, cooked the books and engaged in graft, and smuggled. They love liberty, but "took human inequality for granted"; and corruption exists in every corner of government as well as business. "American history," McDougall concludes, "is a tale of human nature set free."

Yet if the theme of "hustling" is pervasive, one gets a strong sense that there is an even deeper theme that McDougall is concerned with: telling the truth, exposing hypocrisy, and understanding the complexity of America's story. By the book's conclusion McDougall has come around 180 degrees: He ends *Throes of Democracy* with an absorbing portrait of Orestes Brownson, the editor, writer, and political philosopher whose life spanned the scope of this book. Brownson was an arresting study in contradictions. A youthful radical, he came to believe that American democracy was slated for ruin unless the U.S. became "a Christian republic" (he converted to Catholicism, a religion he had once derided as "ignorant"). A humanitarian, he was also a crank who exhausted his allies, confounded his foes, and seemingly affronted everyone. A former supporter of John Calhoun, he thought Lincoln "tricky" yet nonetheless supported union and hated slavery. And throughout his long, industrious life, it was the truth more than anything else that galvanized him, year after year, decade after decade.

Reading McDougall's account of the Civil War, one sees more than a touch of Brownson in McDougall's own assessments. The Civil War consumed more than 620,000 lives, and an enduring question for historians is, Why did the men fight? What led them to march to almost certain deaths at the Bloody Angle, the stone walls of Fredericksburg, the clump of trees at Gettysburg on Day Three, and the killing fields of Cold Harbor? It is a good question, and one that some of our leading historians, including the eminent James McPherson, have puzzled over, with contemporary scholarship looking into letters and diaries in search of solutions. Most recent thinking persuasively suggests that Southerners were deeply patriotic, fighting for their nation, while Northerners fought idealistically for Lincoln's crusading vision of freedom and liberty. McDougall, a Vietnam veteran, sees it quite differently. In his sober, unsentimental vision, there are no meaningful generalizations, and conventional wisdom rests on mere platitudes.

But is this true? Wasn't the Civil War ultimately a great and heroic conflict, a conflict that saved the Union, freed the slaves, cemented Lincoln as America's most sublime president and Robert E. Lee as one of its most admired generals? Here again, McDougall loudly dissents. "Let no one persuade you," he writes, "that the Civil War was anything but a catastrophe." Why? Because it caused a wound in American life "that no stitches could mend."

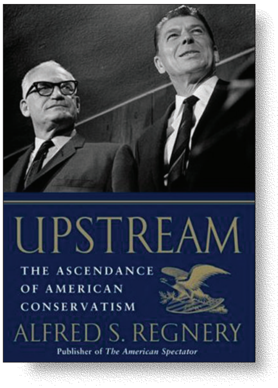
For McDougall one of those stitches, of course, was Reconstruction. With echoes of today's conflict in Iraq, McDougall says that Reconstruction was America's "first experiment in nation building," and an ill-fated one at that. In his rendering, a desegregated, dehumanizing Jim Crow South was in many ways worse than slavery.

Lest anyone get the notion that McDougall plays favorites, he takes equal aim at the foibles and hypocrisies of the North. During the height of the Gilded Age (one of Mark Twain's rich phrases), capitalists were at their zenith, and so were railroad magnates, Wall Street speculators, big-city bosses, financiers, and commerce more generally. The resulting impact on America? "The politicians achieved little," McDougall writes caustically, "besides making immigrants docile, blacks invisible, and democracy a bad joke."

Here, as elsewhere, we see that McDougall is undaunted by the latest political fashion, or the strictures of political correctness, or the weight of historical consensus. And here, as elsewhere, he relishes deflating myths and debunking what he sees as the many hypocrisies of Americans. In this vein, one of his more provocative insights particularly caught my eye. Nearing the turn of the 20th century, in the aftermath of the nation's boisterous Centennial celebration, Americans were brimming with confidence and an almost unquenchable can-do spirit. Having tamed the West, or at least subjugated it, and having harnessed the fruits of scientific advances and industrial progress, the country became a nation of crusaders abroad. Yet as McDougall puts it, they were "certain they knew how to do for Cuba, the Philippines, Mexico, China, and the world itself what they were manifestly unable to do for their own conquered South."

Readers of all stripes will find much to disagree with in *Throes of Democracy*, much to debate and to ponder, and even much that will infuriate them. At times, he is perhaps too quick to dismiss theories he doesn't like, or too blithe in his assessments. But McDougall is not to be taken lightly. This book is the second volume of a projected trilogy about America, the sequel to his *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, which covered the period from 1585 to 1828. He is also a respected historian at the University of Pennsylvania and a Pulitzer Prize–winner for his history of the space race. More than that, like many of the characters he writes about, he is refreshingly quirky. His approach is intelligent, incisive, often original, and commendably thought-provoking. His work belongs on the bookshelf of all serious aficionados of history. **NR**

Turning the Tide


UPSTREAM
THE ASCENDANCE OF AMERICAN CONSERVATISM
ALFRED S. REGNERY
Publisher of The American Spectator

Upstream: The Ascendance of American Conservatism,
by Alfred S. Regnery
(Threshold, 448 pp., $26)

RICHARD V. ALLEN

IN this quadrennial silly season, the political spectacle can get discouraging. What better moment, then, for the appearance of Alfred Regnery's splendid—and definitive—new history of the triumph of the conservative movement over the past half century?

No one even remotely familiar with the tough but determined "upstream" slog of conservatives since 1950 can fail to appreciate how great their achievement was. The movement started out small and fragmented; conservatives, in Regnery's words, "had no organizations, they had no networks, they had no voice, and they had no power." Liberal intellectuals constituted and defined the dominant culture, and had little or no respect for conservative views and the conservative agenda, to the extent one could be discerned. Access to mainstream media for conservatives was basically nil, their views being considered reactionary; even in the academy, where individual conservative scholars could work unmolested in relative security, liberal faculty members reigned. Indeed, as Regnery notes, "the term 'conservative' was rarely used, and it is probably safe to assume that few people really knew what it meant."

Mr. Allen, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, served as national security adviser to President Reagan.

We have been blessed with the fine work of other historians—George Nash and Lee Edwards come readily to mind—who have written eloquently of the emergence of conservatism. Regnery joins their ranks, putting under his microscope the various discrete strands of the movement, each of which developed and operated more or less independently: libertarians/classical liberals; anti-Communists; traditionalists; and a fourth, disparate strand comprising "young conservative journalists, publishers, and activists" ready and willing to take on the establishment.

Without intending to create an actual political movement, libertarian intellectuals Friedrich Hayek (in *The Road To Serfdom*, 1944) and Ludwig von Mises (in *Human Action*, 1949) made breakthroughs that could not be disregarded. Their arguments for the freedom of the individual and against the dangers of collectivism and the welfare state were so powerful and important that they opened the door for an array of brilliant thinkers and writers, academics and popularizers alike—Milton Friedman, Henry Hazlitt, Felix Morley, George Stigler, and others.

Working in another compartment were the sophisticated and experienced anti-Communists, whose ranks featured many who had earlier been convinced Communist activists but had seen the light. Perhaps the most influential was James Burnham; he was soon joined by other brilliant critics of Communism, including Frank Meyer, Whittaker Chambers, and Will Herberg.

Alfred Regnery's new history of the triumph of the conservative movement over the past half century is splendid and definitive.

The third group, the traditionalists, saw as their main tasks the defense of the West and the hard fight to maintain traditional values and standards—as the bedrock not only of the American republic but of civilization itself. The iconic and self-effacing Russell Kirk offered a critically important foundation stone for this branch in its post-war incarnation with his classic 1953 study, *The Conservative Mind*, which to this day comes as close to defining this group's standards as anything else written in the last half century. Landmark studies such as Kirk's do not, of course, suddenly appear without stimulating reflection on their provenance; Richard Weaver's 1948 *Ideas Have Consequences*—itself an enduring masterpiece—helped shape Kirk's thought. Operating in the background were other important works, not to be fully "discovered" until years later, including Eric Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics* (1952) and several of Leo Strauss's studies: *On Tyranny* (1948), *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952), and *Natural Right and History* (1953). Oddly, both of these scholars resisted any identification with the conservative movement, yet eventually came to exert a profound influence on its adherents. Others, like Gerhart Niemeyer, unhesitatingly affirmed the conservative cause.

Regnery justly devotes much care to identifying and tracing the intellectual components of the conservative movement because he recognizes that it was precisely this pioneering intellectual work that made possible the movement's later practical achievements. Too many of the conservative commentariat today, especially in the talk-radio and activist sectors, are programmatic and either ignore or are simply unschooled in the foundational thought.

One of the earliest and most important results of the post-war foundation provided by the intellectuals was the sensational appearance on the scene of William F. Buckley Jr., with his call to arms in *God and Man at Yale* (1951). No one quite knew how to react to the Buckley challenge, possibly because of his youth and certainly because of his singular determination to expose the reigning ideologists of academe—or, as Martin Anderson has dubbed them, the "impostors in the temple."

Human Events, the weekly founded in 1944 by Frank Hanighen, Felix Morley, and Henry Regnery, father of Alfred and a pioneer in the cause of conservative publishing, made a major contribution. Over the years, it became Ronald Reagan's favorite newspaper, giving fits to the less-committed among his presidential entourage.

The Foundation for Economic Education, led by Frank Chodorov and Leonard E. Read, gave birth to the extraordinary Intercollegiate Society of Individualists—later known as the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, and led for decades by the recently deceased E. Victor Milione—through whose "portals" have passed tens of thousands of conservative students, including M. Stanton Evans and Regnery himself. (This reviewer counts his own 1955 encounter with ISI as a major lifetime event.)

At the same time, foundations—including Earhart, Scaife, Volker, Richardson, Salvatori, and Pew—were making major grants to such emerging think tanks as the American Enterprise Institute, the Hoover Institution, and the Foreign Policy Research Institute at the University of Pennsylvania. Regnery reports that, even now, "the five largest conservative foundations' *total assets* are less than the money the five largest left-leaning foundations give away *in a year*."

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They were hardly a match for the pillars of the liberal establishment when it came to funding, so these foundations—and others following later, including Bradley, Milliken, and Olin—had to target their grants very wisely indeed.

NATIONAL REVIEW would no longer be the lonely voice of the Right—soon, other publications sprang up as important auxiliary conveyors of opinion—but it remained the flagship enterprise and, as Regnery notes, "pulled the three components of what would become the conservative movement into one cohesive unit." For the first time, "fusion" (the basic thesis of Frank S. Meyer) would take place: "Traditionalists, anti-Communists, and libertarians complemented rather than contradicted one another; they formed the three legs of the stool" of an effective political organization, and in 1960 the movement gained another crucial ally with the founding of Young Americans for Freedom.

The emergence of Barry Goldwater provided an inviting and natural opportunity for conservatives to pursue a unified agenda and to test organizational principles for supporting a candidate from the Right. Some viewed his defeat as a permanent setback, but others took heart, realizing that the message had gained critical traction. Not incidentally, the 1964 campaign also launched the political career of Ronald Reagan.

Regnery traces the reappearance of Richard Nixon by 1968, and analyzes the hopes harbored by conservatives that Nixon would embrace, to some extent at least, their agenda. Nixon needed the conservative base to gain power, but in fact had no intention of adopting its domestic or foreign-policy priorities. Just as Eisenhower in his time earned the opposition of the Right, so, too, did Nixon—and things were no better with his successor, Gerald Ford.

The presidential election of 1976 became the first real "issues test" for the conservative agenda, and took definitive shape in Reagan's primary challenge against Ford, which was thought by the Republican Establishment to be mere *lèse-majesté*. Reagan nearly defeated Ford for the nomination, but loyally campaigned for him against Jimmy Carter. Reagan thoroughly rejected the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger policies of détente with the Soviet Union. By now the conservative program was firmly established, a force to be reckoned with; its activist, scholarly, and public-policy base gained strength and influence through widespread media exposure. Liberals were on notice; the Right was presenting increasingly appealing alternatives on every conceivable issue.

As with 1964, defeat carried within it the seeds of victory. More determined than ever to keep the agenda alive, the new conservative establishment was ready for full-time engagement. As the Carter administration proceeded from one blunder to the next—culminating in the 1979 Iranian capture of U.S. hostages, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, double-digit inflation, and Carter's diagnosis of America as suffering from a malaise—the public was increasingly anxious, and getting ready to give the conservatives a chance.

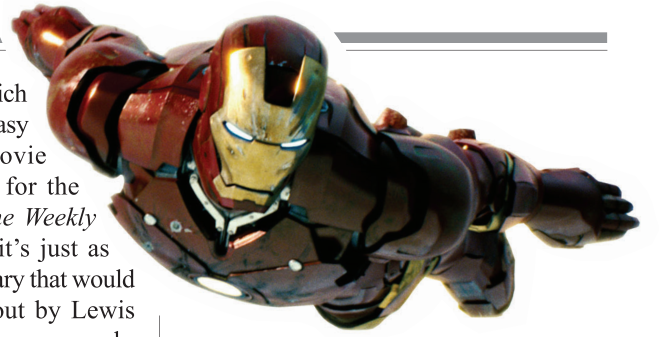
Reagan won, of course, in a landslide, and the details of his eight years in office are now the core of the conservative memory—especially the achievement of his long-cherished goal of not merely "managing" the Cold War but actually *winning* it for America. In politics, Reagan was the man who changed the game: As Regnery puts it, "the conservative movement came of age with Ronald Reagan" and "reached its apex during Reagan's presidency." More important, Reagan "took the negative edge off conservatism" and "showed people that conservatives were not just grumpy old men mulling over philosophical questions, but real, living Americans of all ages." Regnery adroitly segments, summarizes, and analyzes the many facets Reagan presented: anti-Communist, movement conservative, successful governor, teacher, politician, optimist, communicator, Cold Warrior, supply-sider, and, fittingly, revolutionary. Reagan knew that he stood on the shoulders of others; he was grounded in the ideas of Hayek, Mises, Friedman, Kirk, Chambers, Buckley, and many others in the pantheon of conservative thinkers and doers.

Upstream is astute and scholarly, and written by an important participant in the historical flow it traces. It will have an honored place on the bookshelves of conservatives and liberals alike. Get it, read it and mark it up, and pay careful attention to its 45 pages of documentation. You won't be disappointed. **NR**

■ FILM ■

Stark Mad

ROSS DOUTHAT



PARAMOUNT

The script for *Iron Man*, this summer's first successful popcorn flick, belongs atop the syllabus for a class that some enterprising film school ought to offer: *How to Write Action Movies in a Polarized Climate*. Ever since 9/11, and especially since the invasion of Iraq, Hollywood has veered between action heroes who embody the movie industry's left-wing take on world affairs (with the *Bourne* cycle being the most prominent example) and action heroes who exist at a vacuum-sealed remove from minor matters like the Iraq War and the Islamist threat. The superhero genre has been ideal for the latter purpose, since the cape-and-tights set is famous primarily—at least among non-aficionados—for handling dangers either mundane (petty street crime in Gotham) or fantastic (supervillains, superweapons, etc.), while leaving the day-to-day business of geopolitics to ordinary mortals.

But Tony Stark, the wealthy industrialist turned armor-plated avenger, is a different case, since American foreign policy is more or less his raison d'être: His Stark Enterprises is Boeing crossed with DARPA, the high-tech arms-producing heart of the military-industrial complex. Which means that adapting *Iron Man* for the screen would seem to involve making a highly politicized choice: Is Stark's day job the Lord's work or the Devil's? And once he steps into the bulletproof, rocket-propelled suit that makes him a superhero, will he be the scourge of America's foes abroad, or a newly enlightened enemy to the military-industrial baddies he used to serve?

The genius of the *Iron Man* adaptation is that it chooses both at once. (This "genius," I hasten to add, might be the entirely accidental result of the Hollywood habit of piling screenwriter atop screenwriter: The movie's credits give four scribes credit for the finished product, and heaven knows how many uncredited doctors worked it over on the side.) Depending on which details you highlight and which villains you emphasize, it's easy to imagine making the movie sound like it was adapted for the screen by the editors of *The Weekly Standard*—but then again it's just as easy to imagine a plot summary that would sound like it was hashed out by Lewis Lapham and Chalmers Johnson over cocktails at the offices of *Harper's*. If anyone reading this is a neocon dating a *Nation* reader, or vice versa, congratulations: This is the date movie for you.

When *Iron Man* kicks off, Stark is a businessman-inventor by day and a fast-living, hard-drinking, model-bedding playboy by night; his nights, inevitably, are considerably longer than his days, to the despair of the three people he keeps closest to him—his devoted assistant, Pepper Potts (Gwyneth Paltrow); his pal and military liaison, Colonel Rhodes (Terrence Howard); and his mentor and second-in-command, Obadiah Stane (Jeff Bridges, bald, bearded, and bearish). Stark is played with rakish aplomb by Robert Downey Jr., who knows a thing or three about living life at unsafe speeds, and part of the movie's charm is the way it crosses *Superman* with an episode of *E! True Hollywood Story*. It's the fantasy of being rich and famous and handsome all at once—the original character was inspired by Howard Hughes—seen and raised by the fantasy of having superpowers.

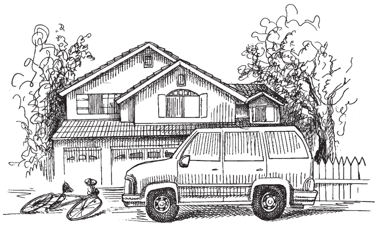
Those powers are acquired in an Afghan cave, where Stark ends up a prisoner after his convoy—driven by soldiers star-struck by his mere presence—gets ambushed by a Talibanesque band of mountain-dwelling thugs. They're led by a shaven-headed megalomaniac named Raza (Faran Tahir), who's using Stark-built weapons in his terror campaign against the local populace, and who thinks that with a few more top-of-the-line models he can dominate all of Asia, Genghis Khan–style. Raza puts his prisoner to work making rocket launchers, but of course you should never leave a genius inventor alone in a cave with a blowtorch, a pile of versatile machine parts, and the raw materials for a miniature renewable-energy reactor that I dearly hope will be installed in the next generation of hybrid cars. The result is the Iron Man suit, iteration one, which is big and bad enough to bust Stark out and get him to safety, but which has nothing on iteration two, the snazzy, supersonic version he builds in the basement of his cliffhanging Malibu pad.

Thus armored, Stark pursues post-Afghanistan adventures down parallel tracks. On one, the experience of seeing his weapons in the hands of terrorists provokes a crisis of conscience about the arms business, followed by a confrontation with the qualmless Stane; on the other, the experience of seeing his weapons in the hands of terrorists provokes him to don his suit and soar off to Central Asia for a little unilateral interventionism. These threads would seem to contradict each other just a bit, but the political tension is smoothed over by the script's breezy charms and the gee-whiz action sequences (especially the literally soaring moments in the middle of the film, when Stark is figuring out exactly what his brand-new toy can do). And there's a neat match between the liberation Stark experiences, first from captivity and then from gravity, and the sense of freewheeling silliness that Downey brings to the role—as though he's been sprung not only from prison and the addictions that landed him there, but from the "best young actor of his generation" burden that seemed intertwined with his self-destructive mode of life.

The only bad news, for filmgoers who don't live and die with Marvel and DC, is that the charms (and box-office success) of *Iron Man* are likely to kick off a second wave of comic-book blockbusters to accompany the *X-Men-Spiderman-Batman* wave we've been surfing for nearly a decade now. Which means that our current superhero glut (counting Will Smith's superhero send-up, *Hancock*, four more such movies will be swooping into theaters this summer alone) is only the beginning. Thanks to *Iron Man*, you can expect to see everyone from Captain America to Namor the Sub-Mariner showing up in multiplexes sometime all too soon, and I can almost guarantee that none of them will be served by a script as deft as this one—or be played by Robert Downey Jr. **NR**

■ THE STRAGGLER ■

New Every Morning



JOHN DERBYSHIRE

Is anybody in a good humor at breakfast? Well, Mr. Pickwick was. Our last glimpse of that gentleman is at the breakfast table after the marriage of Mr. Snodgrass. "Mr. Pickwick, having said grace, pauses for an instant, and looks round him. As he does so, the tears roll down his cheeks, in the fulness of his joy."

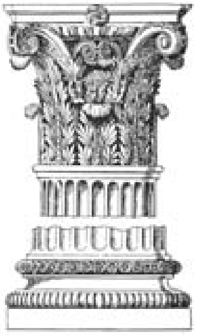
All right for *him*. In those days the gentry breakfasted at ten, even without the excuse of a morning wedding, and drank Madeira with their broiled ham and eggs, and had a day of idleness in front of them. For us working stiffs it's the 6 A.M. trill of the alarm clock, the groping for clothes in darkness from consideration for the spouse still asleep, the stumble downstairs to the kitchen, a grayish dawn showing beyond the windows. It's not Dickens who comes to my mind at such moments but the author of "Jerusalem, My Happy Home":

> No dampish mist is seen in thee,
> No cold nor darksome night . . .

There spoke a man who had to get up in the morning. Quite possibly he began his breakfast arrangements by putting a scoop of oatmeal into a bowl, as I do. Our morning routines diverge after that, there having been no microwave ovens in the 16th century, nor any bananas to slice into the cooked porridge. Orange juice I am not sure about. I have read somewhere that a Jesuit imprisoned in the Tower of London during the reign of Elizabeth I used to communicate with the outside world via invisible orange-juice writing. The recipient would warm the paper by a candle, revealing the words. How bad could the Tower have been, if they had orange juice? Idle thoughts, as I trudge down the driveway in the dampish mists to retrieve my *New York Post*.

Setting the *Post* on the kitchen table, I cross to the counter to add the necessary splash of cold milk to my oatmeal. In those few seconds my teenage daughter, the household's other lark, appears and spots the paper. There is a picture of some celebrity on the front page, unknown to me but of consuming interest to her. I open negotiations for a share of the paper, coming away with the op-eds and business news. We settle at the table and eat in silence, Dad with his pundits and mergers, she with her movie stars.

Oatmeal and I go back a long way together. At the remotest edge of memory I sit watching fascinated as a thread of treacle descends from a spoon held over a bowl of porridge. When the leisurely treacle meets the porridge it suddenly becomes an active thing, its thread crossing and re-crossing itself frantically in one spot, as if trying to write, but melting to a little golden pool before the words can form. The treacle was Tate & Lyle's Golden Syrup, with that peculiar picture on the can: a dead lion in whose carcass—improbably, I recall thinking even in infancy—some bees had nested. "Out of the strong came forth sweetness," said the caption. Has any other breakfast food been packaged with a Biblical quotation, I wonder?



Oatmeal porridge was of course only a prologue to the heroic multi-course English breakfasts of my childhood. The entree was a full plate of heaped protein: eggs and bacon, big flat fleshy "field" mushrooms, blood sausage, and bread. All had been fried—yes, including the bread—in a half inch of lard in my mother's frying pan. After breakfast the lard was allowed to cool until solid, then the pan, lard and all, could be hung on a hook on the wall ready for the next day's breakfast. Why waste good lard?

There were occasional extras. My own favorite was kidneys, split lengthwise and fried with the rest. (A taste I share with Leopold Bloom: "Thursday: not a good day either for a mutton kidney at Buckley's. . . . Better a pork kidney at Dlugacz's.") After the fry-up there would be marmalade on toast, washed down with three or four cups of tea. We were then considered ready to face the world; though looking back on those breakfasts, it's surprising we could even stand upright.

My own children's breakfast tastes are, I am sorry to say, badly undeveloped. They eat cereal with milk. I keep thinking that I should at least try to get them doing it with method and style, using the famous five-page description in *Cryptonomicon* as an instruction text: "The gold nuggets of Cap'n Crunch pelt the bottom of the bowl with a sound like glass rods being snapped in half . . ." I know this would meet resistance, though, especially at irritable 6:30 A.M., so I let it go.

The Chinese side of the Straggler household has its own ideas about breakfast, put into effect after one of the weekly provisioning trips to Chinatown. The central feature is hot soy milk and *you-tiao*, which are foot-long batter-sticks, deep-fried (though not, I am quite sure, in lard) and delicious when crisped up in the oven, but leathery if left uneaten too long. *Lao you-tiao*, "old batter-stick," is in fact an idiom, used to refer to a person who has been toughened up somewhat by life. I once overheard myself referred to thus. Unsure how to take it, I quietly asked a third party. He: "No harm, just means you've knocked around a bit. Okay for a guy. For a woman . . . not so good." Always take care with other people's idioms.

The Straggler family's third breakfast mode, after cereals and *you-tiao*, is American, taken on special occasions at an excellent local diner, all four of us together. I invariably use the opportunity to order corned-beef hash, one of the U.S.'s major contributions to civilized living. You should, if you can, get the cook to let the hash sit in the pan a minute or two. This gives one side of it a thin crust, bringing the hash to culinary perfection. Two eggs on top, some buttered toast on the side, a pot of good American coffee, and I wouldn't trade places with Mr. Pickwick. Has there ever been a civilization that didn't eat breakfast? I bet they didn't last long. **NR**

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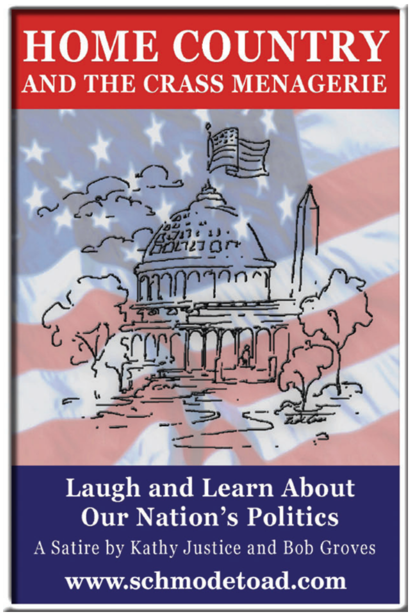

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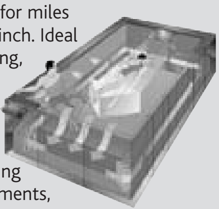

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happy warrior

MARK STEYN

Do You Hear Laughter?

Of late I've been having some sport with a fellow named Oscar van den Boogaard. He's a novelist over in Europe, and, while I'm not the most assiduous reader of Continental fiction, my eye was caught by an interview he gave to the Belgian newspaper *De Standaard*. Reflecting on Europe's accelerating Islamification, he concluded that the jig was up for the Eutopia he loved, but what could he do? "I am not a warrior, but who is?" he shrugged. "I have never learned to fight for my freedom. I was only good at enjoying it."

This seemed such a poignant epitaph for the Continent that I started quoting it hither and yon. And one thing led to another and I started explaining that Mr. van den Boogaard is a Dutch gay humanist, which is, as I like to say, pretty much the trifecta of Eurocool. A cheap joke, but it got a laugh. And before you know it Mr. van den Boogaard was playing the same function in my act that Elizabeth Taylor does in Joan Rivers's. (I haven't seen Miss Rivers since, oh, 1973, so this may have changed.)

Anyway, what with this Internet thingy that the young people are crazy about, it was inevitable that at some point the Dutch novelist wallah would be Googling himself and discovering he was now a household name in Cedar Rapids, or wherever I'd last used him as the butt of my Eurowimp mockery. And so it came to pass. The other day in the newspaper *De Morgen*, Mr. van den Boogaard noted that he had recently attracted the attention of "*de Canadese oerconservatieve commentator* Mark Steyn," who had derided him as "*een Nederlandse homoseksuele humanist*," which is "*de heilige drievuldigheid van Eurocool*." And he attempted to put my sound bite in context. It was a sentimental, writerly, and contrived meditation on his dad's lifelong service to the Dutch army, but it ended with what he regarded as the best hope of saving his beloved Netherlands: "*De islam moet eindelijk om zichzelf leren te lichen*."

"Islam must learn to laugh at itself." Good luck betting the future on that. As the Ayatollah Khomeini *lui-même* put it: "There are no jokes in Islam." And, in the event there are, it's best to make sure the laugh's not on you. As it happens, the British Columbia "Human Rights" Tribunal is about to begin hearing a case brought by the Canadian Islamic Congress into my "flagrant Islamophobia." Among the evidence cited is my review of a Canadian sitcom, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, which I failed to find sufficiently funny, and as a result am now being prosecuted for.

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The new gay

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Appearing at the Heritage Foundation in Washington last year, I was asked a question about the new sitcom and replied, with the careless insouciance of one who's unaware he's being YouTubed around the planet, "Muslim is the new gay." Alas, this line also appears in the Canadian Islamic Congress's indictment of me. I tried to explain that I meant it as a compliment, but this appears only to have made things worse.

My point was that, back in the Nineties, Hollywood movies and sitcoms began introducing gay characters who were the most likeable and got all the best lines, and that Muslims were likely to be the lucky beneficiaries of a similar dispensation. In both cases, the intent is the same—to make Islam, like homosexuality, something only uptight squares are un-hep to. As I say, I meant my crack as a compliment. But it seems to have gone down about as well as the University of Amsterdam study into the recent increase in gay-bashing by Dutch Muslims, which concluded that "the attackers may be struggling with their own sexual identity." Amazingly enough, suggesting that these Muslim chappies are most likely a bit light on their loafers doesn't seem to have done anything to ease inter-communal relations in Europe's "most tolerant city."

Which is by way of saying that, if Mr. van den Boogaard is banking on the old Islamic funny bone to preserve his Eutopia, it's a bit of a long shot. More to the point, he's looking at the problem the wrong way round. It's not about "them," it's about him—or, if you prefer, us: Much of the Western world has a big hole where its sense of identity ought to be. As Ruth Gledhill, the religion correspondent of the *Times* of London, put it: "It feels as if the soul of Britain is dying." She was discussing a new report projecting that by 2050 Christian churchgoers in the United Kingdom will be outnumbered three to one by Muslims. But the hole-in-the-soul line applies just as well to another new report, on the "evolution" of the European family: The marriage rate fell by 24 percent between 1980 and 2006. One in five pregnancies ends in abortion. One million fewer babies were born in the EU last year than in 1980. Europe has 6 million more over-65s than under-14s. Two out of three households have no children . . .

The first comment on the *Times* story was from "Mark," who wrote: "I may be mistaken, but I believe that Muslims tend to have larger families. If that is the case, wouldn't it make more sense to encourage/accept more Muslim immigrants?"

Why, yes, it would—if you don't mind ending your days in a Muslim society.

You can't beat something with nothing—which in the end is what those grim Eurostatistics represent. Islam reckons it's one almighty something, and that's all it has to be when up against contemporary Eutopians. Islam doesn't need to laugh at itself, because it's too busy laughing at them. **NR**

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